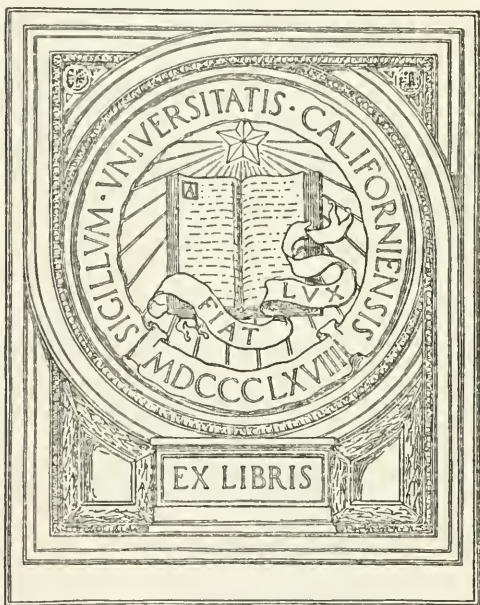


SPURKINDEN

A STORY OF
PUNCHSTOWN
BY
WYATT MERRILL

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
AT LOS ANGELES



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SATANELLA.

—

VOL. I.



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"Do you think it is a wise thing to marry, Clara?"

SATANELLA

A STORY OF PUNCHESTOWN

BY

G. J. WHYTE-MELVILLE

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

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CHAPTER I.

THE BLACK MARE.

“SHE’LL make a chaser anny-how!”

The speaker was a rough-looking man in a frieze coat, with wide mouth, short nose, and grey, honest Irish eyes, that twinkled with humour on occasion, though clouded for the present by disappointment, not to say disgust, and with some reason. In his hand he held a broken strap, with broad and dingy buckle; at his feet, detached from shafts and wheels, lay the body of an ungainly vehicle, neither gig, dog-cart, nor outside car, but something of

each, battered and splintered in a dozen places : while “fore-aninst” him, as he called it, winced and fretted a young black mare, snorting, trembling, fractious, and terrified, with ears laid back, tail tucked down to her strong cowering quarters, and an obyious determination on the slightest alarm to kick herself clear of everything once more.

At her head stood a ragged urchin of fourteen ; although her eyes showed wild and red above the shabby blinkers, she rubbed her nose against the lad’s waistcoat, and seemed to consider him the only friend she had left in the world.

“Get on her back, Patsy,” said the man. “Faix, she’s a well-lepped wan, an’ we’ll take a hate out of her at Punchestown, with the blessin’!—Augh! See now, here’s the young Captain! Ye’re welcome, Captain! It’s meself

was proud when I seen how ye cleaned them out last week on 'Garryowen.' Ye'll come in, and welcome, Captain. Go on in front now, and I'll show you the way !”

So, while a slim, blue-eyed, young gentleman, with curled moustache, accompanied his entertainer into the house, Patsy took the mare to the stable, where he accoutred her in an ancient saddle, pulpy, weather-stained, with stirrups of most unequal length ; proceeding thereafter to force a rusty snaffle into her mouth, with the tightest possible nose-band and a faded green and white front. These arrangements completed, he surveyed the whole, grinning and well-pleased.

That the newcomer could only be a subaltern of Light Dragoons, was obvious from his trim equestrian appearance, his sleek, well-cropped head, the easy sit of his garments, also,

•

perhaps, from an air of imperturbable good-humour and self-confidence, equal to any occasion that might present itself, social, moral, or physical.

Proof against “dandies of punch” and such hospitable provocatives, he soon deserted the parlour for the stable.

“And how is the mare coming on?” said he, standing in the doorway of that animal’s dwelling, which she shared with a little cropped jackass, a Kerry cow, and a litter of pigs. “I always said she could gallop a bit, and they’re the right sort to stay. But can she jump?”

“The beautifullest ever ye see!” replied her enthusiastic owner. “She’ll go wherever a cat would follow a rat. If there’s a harse in Conne-mara that ’ud charge on the sharp edge of a razor, there’s the wan that can do’t! Kick—

stick *and* plaster! it's in their breed; and like th'ould mare before her, so long as you'd hould her, it's my belief she'd stay in the air!"

The object of these praises had now emerged from her stall, and a very likely animal she looked; poor and angular indeed, with a loose neck and somewhat long ears, but in her lengthy frame, and large clean limbs, affording promise for the future of great beauty, no less than extraordinary power and speed. Her head was exceedingly characteristic, lean and taper, showing every vein and articulation beneath the glossy skin, with a wide scarlet nostril and flashing eye, suggestive of courage and resolution, not without a considerable leavening of temper. There are horses, and women too, that stick at nothing. To a bold rider, the former are invaluable, because with these it is possible to keep their mettle under control.

“Hurry now, Patsy!” said the owner, as that little personage, diving for the stirrup, which he missed, looked imploringly to his full-grown companions for a “leg up.”

But it was not in the nature of our young officer, by name John Walters, known in his regiment as “Daisy,” to behold an empty saddle of any kind without longing to fill it. He had altered the stirrups, cocked up his left leg for a lift, and lit fairly in his seat, before the astonished filly could make any more vigorous protest than a lurch of her great strong back and whisk of her long tail.

“Begorra! ye’ll get it now!” said her owner, half to himself, half to the Kerry cow, on which discreet animal he thought it prudent to rivet his attention, distrusting alike the docility of his own filly, and the Englishman’s equestrian skill.

Over the rough paved yard, through the stone gap by the peat-stack, not the little cropped jackass himself could have behaved more soberly. But where the spring flowers were peeping in the turf enclosure beyond, and the upright bank blazed in its golden glory of gorse-bloom, the devilry of many ancestors seemed to pass with the keen mountain-air into the filly's mettle. Her first plunge of hilarity and insubordination would have unseated half the rough-riders that ever mishandled a charger in the school.

Once—twice, she reached forward, with long, powerful plunges, shaking her ears, and dashing wildly at her bridle, till she got rein enough to stick her nose in the air, and break away at speed.

A snaffle, with or without a nose-band, is scarcely the instrument by which a violent

animal can be brought on its haunches at short notice ; but Daisy was a consummate horseman, firm of seat and cool of temper, with a head that never failed him, even when debarred from the proper use of his hands.

He could guide the mare, though incapable of controlling her. So he sent her at the highest place in the fence before him, and, fast as she was going, the active filly changed her stride on the bank with the accuracy of a goat, landing lightly beyond, to scour away once more like a frightened deer.

“You *can* jump!” said he, as she threw up the head that had been in its right place hardly an instant, while she steadied herself for the leap ; “and I believe you’re a flyer. But, by Jove! you’re a rum one to steer!”

She was quite out of his hand again, and laid herself down to her work with the vigour of a

steam-engine. The daisy-sprinkled turf fledged like falling water beneath those long, smooth, sweeping strides.

They were careering over an open upland country, always slightly on the rise, till it grew to a bleak brown mountain far away under the western sky. The enclosures were small; but notwithstanding the many formidable banks and ditches with which it was intersected, the whole landscape wore that appearance of space and freedom so peculiar to Irish scenery, so pleasing to the sportsman's eye. "It looked like galloping," as they say, though no horse, without great jumping powers, could have gone two fields.

It took a long Irish mile, at racing pace, to bring the mare to her bridle, and nothing but her unusual activity saved the rider from half-a-dozen rattling falls during his perilous ex-

periment. She bent her neck at last, and gave to her bit in a potato-ground; nor, if he had resolved to buy her for the sake of her speed and stamina while she was running away with him, did he like her less, we may be sure, when they arrived at that mutual understanding, which links together so mysteriously the intelligences of the horse and its rider.

Turning homewards, the pair seemed equally pleased with each other. She played gaily with the snaffle now, answering hand and heel cheerfully, desirous only of being ridden at the largest fences, a fancy in which he indulged her, nothing loth. Trotting up to four feet and a half of stone wall, round her own stable-yard, she slipped over it without an effort, and her owner, a discerning person enough, added fifty to her price on the spot.

“She’s a good sort,” said the soldier, patting

her reeking neck, as he slid to the ground; “but she’s uncommon bad to steer when her monkey’s up! Sound, you say, and rising four year old? I wonder how she’s bred?”

Such a question could not but entail a voluminous reply. Never, it appeared, in one strain, had been united the qualities of so many illustrious ancestors. Her pedigree seemed enriched with “all the blood of all the Howards,” and her great-great-great-grandam was “Camilla by Trentham, out of Phantom, sister to Magistrate!”

“An’ now ye’ve bought her, Captain,” said our friend in frieze, “ye’ve taken the best iver I bred, an’ the best iver I seen. Av’ I’d let her out o’my sight wanst at Ballinasloe, the Lord-Liftinint ’ud have been across her back, while I’m tellin’ ye, an’ him leadin’ the hunt, up in Meath, or about the Fairy House and Kilrue.

The spade wasn't soldered yet that would dig a ditch to hould her; and when them sort's tired, Captain, begorra! the very breeches 'ud be wore to rags betwixt your knees! You trust *her*, and you trust *me*! Wait till I tell ye now. There's only wan thing on this mortal earth she won't do for ye!"

"And what's that?" asked the other, well pleased.

"She'll not back a bill!" was the answer; "but if iver she schames with ye, renaging* or such like, by this book, I'll be ashamed to look a harse, or so much as a jackass in the face again!"

So the mare was sent for; and Patsy, with a stud reduced to the donkey and the Kerry cow, shed bitter tears when she went away.

* Refusing.



CHAPTER II

MISS DOUGLAS.

IT is time to explain how the young black mare became linked with the fate of certain persons, whose fortunes and doings, good or bad, are related in this story.

To that end the scene must be shifted, and laid in London—London, on a mild February morning, when even South Audley Street and its tributaries seemed to exhale a balmy fragrance from the breath of spring.

In one of these, a window stood open on the drawing-room floor—so wide open that the

baker, resting his burden on the area railings below, sniffed the perfume of hyacinths bursting their bulbs, and beat time with floury shoes to the notes of a wild and plaintive melody, wailing from the pianoforte within.

Though a delicate little breakfast-service had not yet been removed from its spider-legged table, the performer at the instrument was already hatted and habited for a ride. Her whole heart, nevertheless, seemed to be in the tips of her fingers while she played, drawing from the keys such sighs of piteous plaint, such sobs of sweet seductive sorrow, as ravished the soul of the baker below, creating a strong desire to scale the window-sill, and peep into the room. Could he have executed such a feat, this is what he would have seen.

A woman of twenty-five, tall, slim-waisted, with a wealth of blue-black hair, all made fast

and coiled away beneath her riding-hat in shining folds, massive as a three-inch cable. A woman of graceful gestures, undulating like the serpent; of a shapely figure, denoting rather the graces of action, than the beauty of repose; lithe, self-reliant, full of latent energy, betraying in every movement an inborn pride, tameless though kept down, and incurable as Lucifer's before his fall.

The white hands moving so deftly over the keys were strong and nervous, with large blue veins and taper fingers; such hands as denote a vigorous nature and a resolute will—such hands as strike without pity, and hold with tenacious grasp—such hands as many a lofty head has bowed its pride to kiss, and thought no shame.

Lower and lower, she bent over them while she played—softer and softer sank and swelled, and died away, the sad suggestive notes, burst-

ing at last into a peal and crash of harmony, through which there came a short quick gasp for breath like a sob. Then she shut the piano-forte with a bang, and walked to the glass over the fire-place.

It reflected a strangely-fascinating face, so irregular of features that women sometimes called it "positively plain;" but on which the other sex felt neither better nor wiser men when they looked. The cheek-bones, chin, and jaws were prominent; the eye-brows, though arched, too thick; and for feminine beauty, the mouth too firm, in spite of its broad white teeth, and dark shade pencilled on the upper lip, in spite even of its saucy curl and bright bewildering smile.

But when she lifted her flashing eyes fringed in their long black lashes, there was no more to be said. They seemed to blaze and soften, shine

and swim, all in one glance that went straight to a man's heart, and made him wince with a thrill akin to pain.

Pale women protested she had too much colour, and vowed she painted; but no cosmetics ever yet concocted could have imitated her deep rich tints, glowing like those of the black-browed beauties one sees in Southern Europe, as if the blood ran crimson beneath her skin—as if she, too, had caught warmth and vitality from their generous climate and their sunny, smiling skies. When she blushed, it was like the glory of noonday; and she blushed now, while there came a trampling of hoofs in the street, a ring at the door-bell.

The colour faded from her brow, nevertheless, before a man's step dwelt heavily on the staircase, and her visitor was ushered into the room as "General St. Josephs."

“You are early, General,” said she, giving him her hand with royal condescension; “early, but welcome, and—and—— The horses will be round in five minutes—— Have you had any breakfast? I am afraid my coffee is quite cold.”

General St. Josephs knew what it was to starve in the Crimea and broil in the Mutiny; had been shot at very often by guns of various calibres; had brought into discipline one of the worst-drilled regiments in the service, and was a distinguished officer, past forty years of age. What made his heart beat, and his hands turn cold? Why did the blood rush to his temples, while she gave him greeting?

“Don’t hurry, pray!” said he; “I can wait as long as you like. I’d wait the whole day for you, if that was all!”

He spoke in a husky voice, as if his lips were

dry. Perhaps that was the reason she seemed not to hear.

Throwing the window wide open, she looked down the street. Taking more of that thoroughfare than was convenient by advancing lengthways, with many plunges and lashings out, and whiskings of her long square tail, a black mare with a side-saddle was gradually approaching the door. The groom who led her seemed not a little relieved when he got her to stand by the kerb-stone, patting her nose and whispering many expletives suggestive of composure and docility.

This attendant, though gloved, booted, and belted for a ride, felt obviously that one such charge as he had taken in hand was enough. He meant to fetch his own horse from the stable as soon as his mistress was in the saddle.

A staid person, out of livery, came to the door, looking up and down the street with the weary air of a man who resides chiefly in his pantry. He condescended to remark, however, that "Miss Douglas was a-comin' down, and the mare's coat had a polish on her same as if she'd been varnished."

While the groom winked in reply, Miss Douglas appeared on the pavement; and the baker, delivering loaves three doors off, turned round to wonder and approve.

"May I put you up?" said the General meekly, almost timidly.

How different the tone, and yet it was the same voice that had heretofore rung out so firm and clear in stress of mortal danger, with its stirring order—

"The Light Brigade will advance!"

"No, thank you," said Miss Douglas coldly;

“Tiger Tim does the heavy business. Now, Tim—one—two—three!”

“Three” landed her lightly in the saddle, and the black mare stood like a sheep. One turn of her foot, one kick of her habit—Miss Douglas was established where she looked her best, felt her best, and liked best to be in the world.

So she patted the black mare’s neck, a caress her favourite acknowledged with such a bound as might have unseated Bellerophon; and followed by Tim, on a good-looking chesnut, rode off with her admiring General to the Park.

Who *is* Miss Douglas? This was the question everybody asked, and answered too, for that matter, but not satisfactorily. Blanche Douglas—such was the misnomer of this black-browed lady—had been in London for two years, yet given no account of her antecedents, shown no

vouchers for her identity. To cross-question her was not a pleasant undertaking, as certain venturesome ladies found to their cost. They called her "The Black Douglas," indeed, out of spite, till a feminine wit and genius gave her the nickname of "Satanella;" and as Satanella she was henceforth known in all societies.

After that people seemed more re-assured, and discovered, or possibly invented for her, such histories as they considered satisfactory to themselves. She was the orphan, some said, of a speculative naval officer, who had married the cousin of a peer. Her father was drowned off Teneriffe; her mother died of a broken heart. The girl was brought up in a west-country school till she came of age; she had a thousand a year, and lived near South Audley Street with her aunt, a person of weak intellect, like many

old women of both sexes. She was oddish herself, and rather bad style; but there was no harm in her!

This was the good-natured version. The ill-natured one was the above travestied. The father had cut his throat; the mother ran away from him, and went mad; and the west-country school was a French convent. The aunt and the thousand a year were equally fabulous. She was loud, bold, horsy, more than queer, and where the money came from that kept the little house near South Audley Street and enabled her to carry on, goodness only knew!

Still she held her own, and the old men fell in love with her. "My admirers," she told Mrs. Cullender, who told *me*, "are romantic—very, and rheumatic also, *à faire pleurer*. The combination, my dear, is touching, but exceedingly inconvenient."

Mrs. Cullender further affirms that old Buxton would have married and made her a peeress, had she but held up her finger; and declares she saw Counsellor Cramp go down on his knees to her, falling forward on his hands, however, before he could get up again, and thus finishing his declaration, as it were, on all-fours!

But she would have none of these, inclining rather to men of firmer mould, and captivating especially the gallant defenders of their country by sea and land. Admirals are all susceptible more or less, and fickle as the winds they record in their log-books. So she scarcely allowed them to count in her score; but at one time she had seven general-officers on the list, with colonels and majors in proportion.

Her last conquest was St. Josephs—a handsome man, and a proud, cold, reserved, deep-hearted, veiling under an icy demeanour a

temper sensitive as a girl's. How many women would have delighted to lead such a captive up and down the Ride, and show him off as the keeper shows off his bear in its chain! How many would have paraded their sovereignty over this stern and quiet veteran, till their own hearts were gone, and they longed to change places with their victim, to serve where they had thought only to command!

In February London begins to awake out of its winter sleep. Some of the great houses have already got their blinds up, and their doorsteps cleaned. Well-known faces are hurrying about the streets, and a few equestrians spot the Ride, like early flies crawling over a window-pane. The black mare lashed out at one of these with a violence that brought his heart into the soldier's mouth, executing thereafter some half-dozen long and dangerous plunges. Miss Dou-

glas sat perfectly still, giving the animal plenty of rein ; then administered one severe cut with a stiff riding-whip, that left its mark on the smooth shining skin ; and, having thus asserted herself, made much of her favourite, as if she loved it all the better for its wilfulness.

“I wish you wouldn’t ride that brute !” said the General tenderly. “She’ll get out of your hand some of these days, and then there’ll be a smash !”

“Not ride her !” answered Miss Douglas, opening her black eyes wide. “Not ride my own beautiful pet ! General, I should deserve never to get into a side-saddle again !”

“For the sake of your friends,” urged the other, drawing very close with a pressure of the leg to his own horse’s side ; “for the sake of those who care for you ; for—for—*my* sake—Miss Douglas !”

His hand was almost on the mare's neck, his head bent towards its rider. If a man of his age can look "spoony," the General was at that moment a fit subject for ridicule to every Cornet in the Service.

Laughing rather scornfully, with a turn of her wrist, she put a couple of yards between them.

"Not even for *your* sake, General, will I give up my darling. Do you think I have no heart?"

His brow clouded. He looked very stern and sad, but gulped down whatever he was going to say, and asked instead, "Why are you so fond of that mare? She's handsome enough, no doubt, and she can go fast; but still, she is not the least what I call a lady's horse."

"That's my secret," answered Miss Douglas playfully; "wouldn't you give the world to know?"

She had a very winning way, when she chose,

all the more taking from its contrast to her ordinary manner. He felt its influence now.

“I believe I would give *you* the world if I had it, and not even ask for your secret in exchange,” was his reply. “One more turn, Miss Douglas, I entreat you!” (for she was edging away as if for home.) “It is not near luncheon-time, and I was going to say—Miss Douglas—I was going to say——”

“Don’t say it now!” she exclaimed, with a shake of her bridle that brought the mare in two bounds close to the footway. “I *must* go and speak to him! I declare she knows him again. He’s got a new umbrella. There he is!”

“Who?”

“Why! Daisy!”

“D—n Daisy!” said the General, and rode moodily out of the Park.



CHAPTER III.

DAISY.

MR. WALTERS piqued himself on his *sang-froid*. If the *fractus orbis* had gone, as he would have expressed it, "to blue smash," "*impavidum ferient ruinæ*," he would have contemplated the predicament from a ludicrous rather than a perplexing point of view. Nevertheless, his eye grew brighter, and the colour deepened on his cheek, when Miss Douglas halted to lean over the rails and shake hands with him.

He was very fond of the black mare, you see,

and believed firmly in her superiority to her kind.

“Oh! Daisy! I’m so glad to see you!” said Miss Douglas. “I never thought you’d be in London this open weather. I’m so much obliged to you, and you’re the kindest person in the world; and—and—isn’t she looking well?”

“You’re *both* looking well,” answered Daisy gallantly; “I thought I couldn’t miss you if I walked up this side of the Row and down the other.”

“Oh! Daisy! You didn’t come on purpose!” exclaimed the lady, with rather a forced laugh, and symptoms of a blush.

For answer, I am sorry to say, this young gentleman executed a solemn wink. The age of chivalry may or may not be on the wane, but woman-worshippers of to-day adopt a free-and-easy manner in expressing their adoration,

little flattering to the shrines at which they bow.

“Did you really want to see me?” continued Miss Douglas; “and why couldn’t you call? I’d have ridden with you this morning if I’d known you were in town.”

“Got no quad,” answered the laconic Daisy.

“And yet you lent me your mare!” said she. “Indeed, I can’t think of keeping her; I’ll return her at once. Oh! Daisy! you unselfish——”

“Unselfish what?”

“Goose!” replied the lady. “Now, when will you have her back? She’s as quiet again as she used to be, and I do believe there isn’t such another beauty in the world.”

“That’s why I gave her to *you*,” answered Daisy. “It’s no question of lending; she’s yours, just as much as this umbrella’s mine. Beauty! I should think she *was* a beauty. I

don't pay compliments, or I'd say—there's a pair of you! Now, look here, Miss Douglas, I might ask you to lend her to me for a month, perhaps, if I saw my way into a real good thing. I don't think I ever told you how I came to buy that mare, or what a clipper she is!"

"Tell me *now!*" said Miss Douglas eagerly. "Let's move on; people stare so if one stops. You can speak the truth walking, I suppose, as well as standing still!"

"It's truth I'm telling ye!" he answered, with a laugh. "I heard of that mare up in Roscommon when she was two years old. I was a year and a half trying to buy her; but I got her at last, for I'm not an impatient fellow, you know, and I never lose sight of a thing I fancy I should like."

"Watch and wait!" said the lady.

"Yes, I watched and I waited," he continued,

“till at last they gave me a ride. She'd had a good deal of fun with a sort of go-cart they tried to put her in; and when I saw her I think her owner was a little out of conceit with his venture. She was very poor and starved-looking,—not half the mare she is now; but she ran away with me for nearly two miles, and I found she *could—just!* So I bargained, and jawed, and bothered, though I gave a hatful of money for her all the same. When I got her home to barracks, I had her regularly broke and bitted; but she never was easy to ride, and she never will be!”

For all comment, Miss Douglas drew the curb-rein through her fingers, while the mare bent willingly and gently to her hand.

“Oh! I know they all go pleasant with *you!*” said Daisy. “Men and horses, you've the knack of bringing them to their bridles in a day!”

Well, I hunted her that season in Meath and Kildare; but somehow we never dropped into a run. At last one morning, late in the season, we turned out a deer in the Dublin country, and took it in exactly twenty-seven minutes. *Then* this child knew what its plaything was made of. Didn't I, old girl?"

He patted the mare's neck, and her rider, whose eyes brightened with interest, laid hers on exactly the same spot when his hand was withdrawn.

"You found her as good as she looks," said Miss Douglas. "Oh! Daisy! in that grass country it must have felt like being in heaven!"

"I don't know about that," said the Light Dragoon; "but we were not very far off, sometimes, on the tops of those banks. However, I found nothing could touch her in jumping, or come near her for pace. Not a horse was within

a mile of us for the last ten minutes; so I took her down to the Curragh — and — Miss Douglas, can you—*can* you keep a secret?”

“Of course I can,” replied the lady. “What a question, Daisy; as if I wasn’t much more like a man than a woman!”

His face assumed an expression of solemnity befitting the communication he had to impart. His voice sank to a whisper, and he looked stealthily around, as if fearful of being overheard.

“We tried her at seven pound against Robber-Chief, four Irish miles over a steeple-chase course. She gave the Chief seven pound, her year, and a beating. Why, it makes her as good as the Lamb!”

Notwithstanding the gravity of such a topic, Miss Douglas laughed outright.

“How *like* you, Daisy, to run away with an idea. It does *not* make her as good as the

Lamb, because you once told me yourself that Robber-Chief never runs kindly in a trial. You see I don't forget things. But all the same, I dare say she's as good again, the darling, and I'm sure she's twice as good-looking!"

"Now, don't you see, Miss Douglas?" proceeded Daisy, "I've been thinking you and I might do a good stroke of business if we stood in together. My idea is this. I enter her at Punchestown for the Great United Service Handicap. I send her down to be trained on the quiet at a place I know of, not fifteen miles from where we're standing now. Nobody can guess how she's bred, nor what she is. They mean to put crushing weights on the public runners. She'll be very well in, I should say, at about eleven stone ten. I'll ride her myself, for I know the course, and I'm used to that country. If we win, you must have half the stakes, and

you can back her, besides, for as much as you please. What do you say to it?"

"I like the idea *immensely!*" answered Miss Douglas. "Only I don't quite understand about the weights and that—— But, Daisy, are you *sure* it isn't dangerous? I mean for *you*. I've heard of such horrible accidents at those Irish steeple-chases."

"I tell you she *can't* fall," answered this sanguine young sportsman; "and I hope I'm not likely to tumble off *her!*"

Miss Douglas hesitated. "Couldn't I——" she said shyly; "couldn't I ride her in her gallops myself?"

He laughed; but his face clouded over the next moment.

"I ought not to have asked you," said he; "it seems so selfish to take away your favourite; but the truth is, Miss Douglas, I'm so awfully

hard up that, unless I can land a good stake, it's all U—P with me!"

"Why didn't you tell me?" exclaimed Miss Douglas; "why didn't you——" Here she checked herself, and continued in rather a hard voice, "Of course, if you're in a fix, it must be got out of, with as little delay as possible. So take the mare, by all means; and another time, Daisy—— Well, another time don't be so shy of asking your friend's advice. If I'd been your brother-officer, for instance, should I have seemed such a bad person to consult?"

"By Jove, you're a trump!" he exclaimed impulsively, adding, in qualification of this outspoken sentiment, "I mean, you've so good a heart, you ought to have been a man!"

She coloured with pleasure; but her face turned very grave and sad, while she replied,

“I wish I had been! Don’t you know what Tennyson says? Never mind, you don’t read Tennyson very often, I dare say.”

“I can’t make out what fellows *mean* in poetry,” answered Daisy. “But I like a good song, if it’s in English; and I like best of all to hear *you* play!”

“Now, what on earth has that to do with it?” she asked impatiently. “We are talking about the mare. Send round for her to-morrow morning, and you can enter her at once. Has she got a name?”

“It used to be The Dark Ladye,” he answered, smiling rather mischievously, “out of compliment to *you*. But I’ve changed it now.”

“I ought to be very much flattered. And to what?”

“To Satanella.”

She bit her lip, and tried to look vexed; but she couldn't be angry with Daisy, so laughed heartily as she waved him a good-bye, and cantered home.





CHAPTER IV.

MRS. LUSHINGTON.

WITH all her independence of spirit, it cannot be supposed that Miss Douglas went to and fro in the world of London without a chaperon. On women, an immunity from supervision, and what we may call the freedom of the city, is conferred by matrimony alone. This franchise seems irrespective of age. A virgin of fifty gathers confidence under the wing of a bride nineteen years old, shooting her arrows with the more precision that she feels so safe behind the shield of that tender,

inexperienced matron. Why are these things so? Why do we dine at nightfall, go to bed at sunrise, and get up at noon? Why do we herd together in narrow staircases and inconvenient rooms at the hottest season of the year? If people bore us, why do we ask them to dinner? and suffer fools gladly, without ourselves being wise? I wonder if we shall ever know.

Blanche Douglas accordingly, with more courage, resolution, and *savoir faire*, than nine *men* out of every ten, had placed herself under the tutelage of Mrs. Francis Lushington, a lady with a convenient husband, who, like the celebrated courtier, was never *in* the way nor *out of* the way. She talked about "Frank," as she called him, every ten minutes; but somehow they were seldom seen together, except once a week at afternoon church.

That gentleman himself must either have been the steadiest of mortals, or the most cunning; his wife inclined to think him the latter.

Mrs. Lushington knew everybody, and went everywhere. There was no particular reason why she should have attained popularity; but society had taken her up, and seemed in no hurry to set her down again.

She was a little fair person, with pretty features and a soft pleading voice, very much dressed, very much painted; as good a foil as could be imagined to such a woman as Blanche Douglas.

They were sitting together in the dining-room of the latter about half-past two p.m. There never was such a lady for going out to luncheon as Mrs. Lushington. If you were asked to that pleasant meal at any house

within a mile of Hyde Park Corner, it would have been a bad bet to take five to one about not meeting her. She was like a nice little luncheon herself. Not much of her; but what there was light, delicate, palatable, with a good deal of garnish.

“And which is it to be, dear?” asked this lady of her hostess, finishing her glass of sherry with considerable enjoyment. “I know I shall have to congratulate one of them soon, and to send you a wedding-present; but it’s no use talking about it, till I know which——”

“Do you think it a wise thing to marry, Clara?” said the other in reply, fixing her black eyes solemnly on her friend’s face.

Mrs. Lushington pondered. “There’s a good deal to be said on both sides,” she answered; “and I haven’t quite made up my mind what I should do if I were you. With me, you know,

it was different. If I hadn't made a convenience of Frank, I should have been nursing my dreadful old aunt still. You are very independent as you are, and do no end of mischief. But, my dear, you won't last for ever. That's where we fair women have the pull. And then you've so many to choose from. Yes; I think if I were *you*, I *would!*"

"And—— You'll laugh at me, Clara, I feel," said Miss Douglas. "Do you think it's a good plan to marry a man one don't care for; I mean, who rather bores one than otherwise?"

"I did, dear," was the reply; "but I don't know that I've found it answer."

"It must be dreadful to see him all day long, and have to study his fancies. Breakfast with him, perhaps, every morning at nine o'clock."

"Frank would go without breakfast often enough, if he couldn't make his own tea, and

insisted on such early hours. No, dear, there are worse things than that. We have to be in the country when they want to shoot, and in the spring, too, sometimes if they're fond of hunting.' But, on the other hand, we married women have certain advantages. We can keep more flirtations going at once than you. Though, to be sure, I don't fancy the General would stand much of *that!* If ever I saw a white Othello, it's St. Josephs."

"St. Josephs! Do you think I want to marry St. Josephs?"

Could the General have overheard the tone in which his name was spoken, surely his honest heart would have felt very sore and sad.

"Well, he wants to marry *you!*" was the reply; "and, upon my word, dear, the more I think of it, the more I am convinced you couldn't do better. He is rich enough, rather

good-looking, and seems to know his own mind. What would you have?"

"My dear, I *couldn't!*"

"State your objections."

"Well, in the first place, he's *very* fond of me."

"That shows good taste; but it needn't stand in the way, for you may be sure it won't last."

"But it *will* last, Clara, because I cannot care for *him* in return. My dear, if you knew what a brute I feel sometimes, when he goes away, looking so proud and unhappy, without ever saying an impatient word. Then I'm sorry for him, I own; but it's no use, and I only wish he would take up with somebody else. Don't you think you could help me? Clara, *would* you mind? It's uphill work, I know; but you've plenty of others, and it wouldn't tire you as it does *me!*"

Miss Douglas looked so pitiful, and so much in earnest, that her friend laughed outright.

“I think I should like it very much,” replied the latter, “though I’ve hardly room for another on the list. But if it’s not to be the General, Blanche, we return to the previous question. Who is it?”

“I don’t think I shall ever marry at all,” answered the younger lady, with a smothered sigh. “If I were a man, I certainly wouldn’t; and why wasn’t I a man? Why can’t we be independent? go where we like, do what we like, and for that matter, choose the people we like?”

“Then you *would* choose somebody?”

“I didn’t say so. No, Clara; the sort of person I should fancy would be sure never to care for me. His character must be so entirely different from mine, and though they say, con-

trasts generally agree, black and white, after all, only make a feeble kind of grey."

"Whatever you do, dear," expostulated Mrs. Lushington, "don't go and fall in love with a boy! Of all follies on earth, that pays the worst. They are never the same two days together, and not one of them but thinks more of the horse he bought last Monday at Tattersall's, than the woman he 'spooned,' as they call it, last Saturday night at the Opera."

Miss Douglas winced.

"I cannot agree with you," said she, stooping to pick up her handkerchief; "I think men grow worse rather than better, the more they live in the world. I like people to be fresh, and earnest, and hopeful. Perhaps it is because I am none of these myself, that I rather appreciate boys."

Mrs. Lushington clapped her hands. "The

very thing!" she exclaimed. "He's made on purpose for you. You ought to know Daisy!"

Miss Douglas drew herself up. "I *do* know Mr. Walters," she answered coldly; "if you mean *him*. I believe he is called Daisy in his regiment and by his very particular friends."

"You know him! and you didn't tell *me!*" replied the other gaily. "Never mind. Then, of course, you're devoted to him. I am; we all are. He's so cheery, so imperturbable, and what I like him best for is, that he has no more heart than—than—well, than I have myself. There!"

Miss Douglas was on her guard now. The appropriative faculty, strong in feminine nature as the maternal instinct, and somewhat akin to it, was fully aroused. Only in London, no doubt, would it have been possible for two

such intimates to be ignorant of each other's predilections;" but even here it struck Blanche there was something suspicious in her friend's astonishment, something not quite sincere in her enthusiasm and her praise.

So she became exceedingly polite and affectionate, as a fencer goes through a series of courteous salutes, while proposing to himself the honour of running his adversary through the brisket.

"You make yourself out worse than you are, Clara," said she; "it's lucky I know you so well. Indeed, you musn't go yet. You always run away before I've said half my say. You'll be sure to come again very soon though. Promise, dear. What a love of a carriage!"

It was, indeed, a very pretty Victoria that stopped at the door,—fragile, costly, delicate, like a piece of porcelain on wheels,—and very

pretty Mrs. Lushington looked therein, as she drove away.

She had turned the corner of the street some minutes before Miss Douglas left the window. Passing a mirror, that lady caught the reflection of her own face, and stopped, smiling, but not in mirth.

“They may well call you Satanella,” she said; “and yet I could have been so good—so good!”





CHAPTER V.

THROUGH THE MILL.

“SHE was iron-sinewed and satin-skinned,
Ribbed like a drum, and limbed like a deer,
Fierce as the fire, and fleet as the wind,
There was nothing she couldn't climb or clear ;
Rich lords had vexed me in vain to part,
For their gold and silver, with Britomart.*

“It describes your mare exactly ; and how the gifted, ill-fated author would have liked a ride on such a flyer as Satanella.”

* From “The Romance of Britomart,” not the least stirring of those spirited verses called “Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes,” composed by the late A. Lindsey Gordon, and published at Melbourne, Australia, 1870.

The speaker's voice shook, and the cigar quivered between his lips while they pronounced that ill-omened name.

"She's better than common, General," was the reply. "Just look at *her crest*. They're the right sort, when they train on like that!"

General St. Josephs and Daisy Walters were standing on a breezy upland common, commanding one of the fairest landscapes in England, backed by a curtain of dusky smoke from the great metropolis, skirting two-thirds of the horizon. There was heather at their feet; and a sportsman set down in that spot from the skies might have expected to flush a black-cock rather than to hail a Hansom cab at only two hours' distance from its regular stand in Pall Mall.

The black mare, stripped for a gallop, stood ten yards off in the glow of a morning sun.

That Daisy meant to give her "a spin" was obvious from the texture of his nether garments, and the stiff silver-mounted whip in his hand.

He had met St. Josephs the night before in the smoking-room of a military club, and, entertaining a profound respect for that veteran, had taken him into his counsels concerning the preparations and performances of the black mare. Daisy was prudent, but not cunning. The elder man's experience, he considered, might be useful, and so asked frankly for his advice.

The General cared as little for steeple-chasing as for marbles or prisoners'-base, but in the present instance felt a morbid attraction towards the younger officer and his venture; because he associated the black mare with certain rides that dwelt strangely on his memory, and of which he treasured every

incident with painful accuracy, sometimes almost wishing they had never been.

There is a disease from which, like small-pox, immunity can only be purchased by taking it as often as possible in its mildest form. To contract it sooner or later seems the lot of humanity, and St. Josephs had been no exception to the general rule that ordains men and women shall inflict on each other certain injuries and annoyances, none the less vexatious because flagrantly imaginary and unreal.

The General had loved in his youth, more than oncè it may be, with the ardour and tenacity of his character ; but these follies were now things of the past. In some out-of-the-way corner, perhaps, he preserved a knot of ribbon, a scrap of writing, or a photograph with its hair dressed as before the flood. He could lay his hand on such memorials, no doubt ; but he

never looked at them now, just as he ignored certain sights and sounds, voices, tones, perfumes, that made him wince like a finger on a raw wound. To save his life, he would not have admitted that the breath of a fresh spring morning depressed his spirits more than a sirocco; that he would rather listen to the pipes of a Highland regiment in a mess-room than to a certain strain of Donizetti, the softest, the saddest, the sweetest of that gifted composer—softer, sweeter, sadder to him that it was an echo from the past.

Among the advantages of growing old, of which there are more than people usually imagine, none is greater than the repose of mind that comes with advancing years—from fatigue, indeed, rather than satisfaction, but still repose.

It is not for the young to bask in the sun, to sit over the fire, to look forward to dinner

as the pleasantest part of the day. These must be always in action, even in their dreams; but at and after middle age comes the pleasure of the ruminating animals, the quiet comfort of content. An elderly gentleman, whose liver has outlasted his heart, is not so much to be pitied after all.

Yet must he take exceeding care not to leave go of the rock he clings to, like an oyster, that he may drift back into the fatal flood of sentiment he ought to have baffled, once for all. If he does, assuredly his last state will be worse than his first. Very sweet will be the taste of the well-remembered dram, not so intoxicating as of yore to the seasoned brain; but none the less a stimulant of the senses, a restorative for the frame. Clutching the cup to drain perennial^d youth, he will empty it to the dregs, till the old sot reels,

and the grey hairs fall dishonoured in the dust.

If follies perpetrated for women could be counted like runs in a cricket-match, I do believe the men above forty would get the score.

“Let me see her gallop,” said the General, with a wistful look at the mare, “and I will tell you what I think.”

He too was a fine horseman; but he sighed to reflect he could no longer vault on horseback like Daisy, nor embody himself at once with the animal he bestrode, as did that young and supple Light Dragoon.

“I never saw a better,” said the old officer to himself, as the young one, sitting close into his saddle, set the mare going at three-quarter speed. “And if she’s only half as good as her rider, the Irishmen will have a

job to keep the stakes on their side of the Channel this time! Ah, well. It's no use, we can't hold our own with the young ones, and I suppose we ought not to wish we could!"

The General fell into a very common mistake. We are apt to think women set a high price on the qualities we value in each other, forgetting that as their opinions are chiefly reflected from our own, it is to be talked about, no matter why, that constitutes merit in their eyes. What do they care for a light hand, a firm seat, a vigorous frame, or a keen intellect except in so far as these confer notoriety on their possessor? To be celebrated is enough. If for his virtues, well; if for his vices, better. Even the meekest of them have a strong notion of improving a sinner, and incline to the black sheep rather than all the white innocents of the fold.

In the meantime, Daisy felt thoroughly in his element, enjoying it as a duck enjoys immersion in the gutter. Free-goer as she was, the mare possessed also an elasticity rare even amongst animals of the highest class; but which, when he has once felt it, no horseman can mistrust or mistake. As Daisy tightened his hold on her head, and increased her speed, he experienced in all its force that exquisite sense of motion which, I imagine, is the peculiar pleasure enjoyed by the birds of the air.

Round the common they came, and past the General once more, diverging from their previous direction so as to bring into the track such a fence as they would have to encounter in their Irish contest. It was a high and perpendicular bank, narrow at the top, with a grip on the taking off, and a wide ditch on the landing side. Anything but a tempting

obstacle to face at great speed. Though she had gone three miles very fast, the mare seemed fresh and full of vigour, pulling, indeed, so hard that Daisy needed all his skill to control and keep her in his hand. Approaching the leap, he urged her with voice and limbs. They came at it, racing pace.

“Oh, you tailor!” muttered the General, holding his breath, in fear of a hideous fall. “I’m wrong!” he added, the next moment. “Beautifully done, and beautifully ridden!”

Even at her utmost speed, the mare sprang upright into the air, like a deer, kicked the farther face of the bank with such lightning quickness that the stroke was almost imperceptible; and, flying far beyond the ditch, seemed rather to have gained than lost ground in this interruption to her stride.

Away she went again! Over two more fences, done at the same headlong pace, round the corner of a high black hedge, down into the hollow, up the opposite rise, and so back into the straight, where Daisy, smiling pleasantly and much heightened in colour, executed an imaginary finish, with his hands down.

“I’ve not seen such a goer for years,” observed the General, as her jockey dismounted, and two stable lads scraped a little lather from the mare. “But she seems to take a deal of riding; and I think she is almost *too* free at her fences, even for a steeple-chaser.”

“I’m delighted to hear you say so,” was the answer. “*That’s* where we shall win. When I had her first she was rather cautious; but I hurried and hustled her till I got her temper up; she puts on the steam now as if she was going to jump into next week. I

believe she'd do the great double at Punchestown in her stride!"

The older man shook his head. "She has capital forelegs," said he; "but I saw just such another break its neck last year at Lincoln. When they're so free you must catch hold like grim death; for, by Jove, if they overjump themselves at that pace, they're not much use when they get up again!"

"That *would* be hard lines," said Daisy, lighting a cigar. "It's the only good thing I ever had in my life, and it must *not* boil over. If you come to *that*, I'd rather she broke *my* neck than hers. If anything went wrong with Satanella I could never face Blanche Douglas again!"

"Blanche Douglas!" The General winced. It was not his habit to call young ladies by their Christian names; and to talk familiarly of this one seemed a desecration indeed.

“I should hope Miss Douglas will never ride that animal now,” said he, looking very stiff and haughty—“throaty,” Daisy called it, in describing the scene afterwards.

“Not ride her?” replied the young gentleman. “You can’t know much of Satanella, General, if you suppose she wouldn’t ride anything—ah, or do anything, if you only told her *not!* She’s a trump of a girl, I admit; but, my eyes, she’s a rum one! Why, if there wasn’t a law or something against it, I’m blessed if I don’t think she’d ride at Punchestown herself—boots and breeches—silk jacket—make all the running, and win as she liked! That’s her form, General, you may take my word for it!”

St. Josephs positively stood aghast. Could he believe his ears? Silk jacket! Boots and breeches! And this was the woman he de-

lighted to honour. To have annihilated his flippant young acquaintance on the spot would have given him intense satisfaction; but he was obliged to content himself with contemptuous silence and sundry glances of scorn. His displeasure, however, seemed quite lost on Daisy, who conversed freely all the way back to town, and took leave of his indignant senior with unimpaired affability when they arrived.





CHAPTER VI.

CUTTING FOR PARTNERS.

“**T**HEN you'll—ask a man?”

“I'll ask a man.”

The first speaker was Miss Douglas, the second Mrs. Lushington. These ladies, having agreed to go to the play together, the former at once secured adjoining stalls, for herself, her admirer, her friend, and her friend's admirer. Only in such little parties of four can the modern drama be appreciated or enjoyed.

Miss Douglas had long promised General St. Josephs that she would accompany him to the

performance of a popular farce called *Uncle Jack*, whereof the humour consisted in an abstraction by "Boots" of a certain traveller's garments at his hotel, and consequent engagement of this denuded wayfarer to the lady of his affections. The General would have walked barefoot to Canterbury for the delight of taking Miss Douglas to the play; and, after many missfires, a night was at length fixed for that treat, of course under the supervision of a chaperon.

Like others who follow "will-o'-the-wisps," St. Josephs was getting deeper into the mire at every step. Day by day this dark bewitching woman occupied more of his thoughts, wound herself tighter round his weary heart. Now for the first time since she died he could bear to recall the memory of the blue-eyed girl he was to have married long ago. Now

he felt truly thankful to have baffled the widow at Simla, and behaved like "a monster," as she said, to the foreign countess who used to ride with him in the Park.

Hitherto he was persuaded his best affections had been thrown away, all the nobility of his character wasted and misunderstood. At last he had found the four-leaved shamrock. He cared not how low he stooped to pluck it, so he might wear it in his breast.

For one of his age and standing, such an attachment has its ridiculous as well as its pitiful side. He laughed grimly in his grizzled moustache to find how particular he was growing about the freshness of his gloves and the fit of his coat. When he rode he lengthened his stirrups, and brought his horse more on its haunches. He even adopted the indispensable flower in his button-hole ; but could never

keep it there, because of his large circle of child-friends, to whom he denied nothing, and who regularly despoiled him of any possession that took their fancy. There was one little gipsy, a flirt, three years of age, who could, and would, have coaxed him out of a keepsake from Miss Douglas herself.

Nobody, I suppose, is insane enough to imagine a man feels happier for being in love. There were moments when St. Josephs positively hated himself, and everybody else. Moments of vexation, longing, and a bitter sense of ill-usage, akin to rage, but for the leavening of sadness that toned it down to grief. He knew from theory and practice how to manage a woman, just as he knew how to bridle and ride a horse. Alas! that each bends only to the careless ease of conscious mastery. He could have controlled the Satanella on four

legs almost as well as reckless Daisy. He had no influence whatever over her namesake on two.

Most of us possess the faculty of looking on those affairs in which we are deeply interested from the outside, as it were, and with the eyes of an unbiassed spectator. Such impartial perception, however, while it increases our self-reproach, seems in no way to affect our conduct. General St. Josephs cursed himself for an old fool twenty times a day, but none the more for that did he strive or wish to put from him the folly he deplored.

It was provoking, degrading, to know that in presence of Miss Douglas he appeared at his very worst; that when he rode out with her, he was either idiotically simple, or morosely preoccupied; that when he called at her house, he could neither find topics for conversation,

nor excuses to go away; that in every society, others, whom he rated as his inferiors, must have seemed infinitely pleasanter, wiser, better informed, and more agreeable; and that he, professedly a man of experience, and a man of the world, lost his head, like a raw boy, at the first word she addressed him, without succeeding in convincing her that he had lost his heart. Then he vowed to rebel—to wean himself by degrees—to break the whole thing off at once—to go out of town, leaving no address—to assert his independence, show he could live without her, and never see her again! But when she asked him to take her to the play, he said he should be delighted—and *was!*

Among the many strange functions of society, few seem more unaccountable than its tendency to select a theatre as the rendezvous of sincere

affection. Of all places, there is none, I should imagine, where people are more *en evidence*—particularly in the stalls, a part of the house specially affected, it would seem, as affording no protection to front or rear. Every gesture is marked, every whisper overheard, and even if you might speak aloud, which you mustn't, during the performances, you could hardly impart to a lady tender truths or falsehoods, as the case may be, while surrounded by a mob of people who have paid money with the view of keeping eyes and ears wide open till they obtain its worth.

Nevertheless, and notwithstanding all these drawbacks to confidential communication, no sooner does a fair angler of the present day feel that, in fisherman's language, she "has got a bite," than straightway she carries her prey off to a minor theatre, where by some

inexplicable method of her own, she proceeds to secure the gudgeon on its hook.

St. Josephs got himself up with extreme care on the evening in question. He was nò faded *petit maître*, no wrinkled dandy, curled, padded, girthed, and tottering in polished boots towards his grave. On the contrary, he had the wisdom to grow old gracefully, as far as dress and deportment were concerned, rather advancing than putting back the hand of time. Yet to-night he *did* regret the lines on his worn face, the bald place at the crown of his head. Ten years, he thought, rather bitterly, only give him back ten years, and he could have held his own with the best of them! She might have cared for him ten years ago. Could she care for him now? Yes, surely she must, he loved her so!

“Your brougham is at the door, sir,” said

his servant, once a soldier, like himself; a person of calm temperament and a certain grim humour, whose private opinion it was that his master had of late been conducting himself like an old fool.

The General got into his carriage with an abstracted air, and was driven off to dine nervously and without appetite at the Senior United.

How flabby seemed the fish, how tasteless the cutlets, how insufferably prosy the conversation of an old comrade at the next table—a jovial veteran, who loved highly-seasoned stories, and could still drink the *quantum* he was pleased to call his “whack of Port.” Never before had this worthy’s discourse seemed so idiotic, his stomach so obtrusive, his chuckles so fatuous and inane. What did he mean by talking about “fellows of *our* age,”

to St. Josephs, who was seven years his junior in the Army List, and five in his baptismal register? Why couldn't he eat without wheezing, laugh without coughing, and why, oh! why could he not give a comrade greeting without slapping him on the back? St. Josephs, drinking scalding coffee before the other arrived at cheese, felt his sense of approaching relief damped by remorse for the reserve and coldness with which he treated his old, tried friend. Something whispered to him, even then, how the jolly, gormandising red face would turn to him, true and hearty, when all the love of all the women in London had faded and grown cold.

Nevertheless, at the doors of the theatre his pulses leapt with delight. So well timed was his arrival, that Mrs. Lushington and Miss Douglas were getting out of their carriage

when his own stopped. Pleased, eager as a boy, he entered the house with Satanella on his arm, placing himself between that lady and her friend, while he arranged shawls, foot-stools, scent-bottles, and procured for them programmes of the entertainment—chary, indeed, of information, but smelling strong of musk.

Need I say that he addressed himself at first to Mrs. Lushington? or that, perceiving a vacant stall on the other side of Miss Douglas, his spirit sank within him while he wondered when and how it would be filled?

Satanella seemed tired and abstracted. "Uncle Jack's" jokes fell pointless on her ear. When St. Josephs could at last think of something to say, she bent her head kindly enough, but persistently refused to accept or understand his tender allusions, interesting her-

self then, and then only, in the business of the stage. In sheer self-defence, the General felt obliged to do the same.

The house roared with laughter. A celebrated low comedian was running up and down before the foot-lights in shirt and drawers. The scene represented a bedroom at an inn. The actor rang his bell, tripped over his coal-scuttle, finally upset his water-jug. Everybody went into convulsions, and St. Josephs found himself thinking of the immortal Pickwick, who “envied the facility with which the friends of Mr. Peter Magnus were amused.” Turning to his tormentor, he observed the place by her side no longer vacant, and its occupant was—Daisy!

Mischievous Mrs. Lushington had “asked a man,” you see, and this was the man she asked.

Captious, jealous, sensitive, because he really cared for her, St. Josephs' vexation seemed out of all proportion to its cause. He felt it would have relieved him intensely to "have it out" with Miss Douglas—to scold her, take her to task, reproach her roundly—and for what? *She* had never asked Daisy to come; *she* had not kept a seat for him at her elbow. From her flushed cheek, her bright smile, it could not but be inferred that this was an unexpected meeting—a delightful surprise.

Calm and imperturbable, Daisy settled himself as if he were sitting by his grandmother. Not till he had smoothed his moustache, buttoned his gloves, and adjusted his glasses, did he find time to inform Miss Douglas "that he knew she would be here, but did not think she could have got away from dinner so soon; that the house was hot, the stalls were uncom-

fortable, and this thing was not half bad fun if you'd never seen it before." The General, cursing him for "a cub," wondered she could find anything in such conversation to provoke a smile on that proud, beautiful face.

What was it she whispered behind her fan?—the fan he loved to hold because of the fragrance it seemed to breathe from *her*. He scarcely knew whether to be relieved or irritated when he overheard certain questions as to the progress of the black mare. It vexed him to think these two should have a common interest, should find it so engrossing, should talk about it so low. Why couldn't they attend to the farce they had come on purpose to see?

Mrs. Lushington, although she must have been surfeited with that unmeaning and rather tiresome admiration which such ladies find floating in abundance on the surface of London

society, was yet ready at all times to accept fresh homage, add another captive to the net she dragged so diligently through smooth and troubled waters alike. Till the suggestion came from her friend, it had never occurred to her that the General was worth capturing. She began now in the usual way.

“What a number of pretty women!” she whispered. “Don’t you think so, General? I haven’t seen as much beauty under one roof since Lady Scavenger’s ball.”

Abstracted though he was, her companion had those habits of society which of all others seem to be second nature, so he answered:—

“There are only *two* pretty women in the house as far as I see; and they asked me to come to the play with them to-night.”

She had a fascinating way of looking down and up again, very quick, with a glance, half

shy, half funny, but altogether deadly. Even her preoccupied neighbour felt its influence, while she replied:—

“You say so because you think all women are vain, and like to be flattered, and have no heart. It only shows how little you know us. Do you mean to tell me,” she added, in a lighter tone, “*that’s* not a pretty girl, in the second row there, with a *mauve* ribbon through her hair?”

She *was* pretty, and he thought so; but St. Josephs, being an old soldier in more senses than one, observed sententiously:—

“Wants colouring—too pale—too sandy, and I should say freckled by daylight.”

“We all know you [admire dark beauties,” retorted the lady, “or you wouldn’t be here now.”

“*You’re* not a dark beauty,” returned the

ready General; "and I knew you were coming too."

"That '*too*' spoils it all," said she, with another of her killing glances. "Hush! you needn't say any more. If you won't talk to *her*, at least attend to the stage."

Satanella meanwhile was perusing Daisy's profile as he sat beside her, and wondering whether anybody was ever half so good-looking and so unconscious of his personal advantages. Not in the slightest degree embarrassed by this examination, Mr. Walters expressed his entire approval of the farce as it proceeded, laughing heartily at its "situations," and even nudging Miss Douglas with his elbow, that she might not miss the broadest of the fun. Was there another man in the house who could have accepted so calmly such an enviable situation? and did she like him more or less for this

strange insensibility to her charms? The question must be answered by ladies who are weary of slaughter, and satiated with victory.

“Will she win, Daisy?” hazarded Miss Douglas at last, in a low whisper, such as would have vibrated through the General’s whole frame, but only caused Daisy to request she would “speak up.” Repeating her question, she added a tender hope that “it was all right, and that her darling (meaning the black mare) would pull him through.”

“If she don’t,” replied Daisy, “there’s no more to be said. I must leave the regiment. ‘Soldier Bill’ gets the troop; and I am simply chawed up.”

“Oh, Daisy!” she exclaimed earnestly, “how much would it take to set you straight?”

Mr. Walters worked an imaginary sum on the gloved fingers of his right hand, carried

over a balance of liabilities to his left, looked as grave as he could, and replied, briefly, "Two thou— would tide me over. It would take *three* to pull me through."

Her face fell, and the rich colour faded in her cheek. He did not notice her vexation; for the crisis of the farce had now arrived, and the stage was crowded with all its *dramatis personæ*, tumbling each other about in the intensely humorous dilemma of a hunt for the traveller's clothes; but he *did* remark how grave and sorrowful was her "good night," while she took the General's proffered arm with an alacrity extremely gratifying to that love-stricken veteran. She had never before seemed so womanly, so tender, so confiding. St. Josephs, pressing her elbow very cautiously against his beating heart, almost fancied the pressure returned. He was sure her hand clung

longer than usual in his clasp when the time came to say "Good-bye."

In spite of a headache and certain angry twinges of rheumatism, this gallant officer had never felt so happy in his life.





CHAPTER VII.

“GETTING ON.”

OUTSIDE the theatre the pavement was dry, the air seemed frosty, and the moon shone bright and cold. With head down, hands in pockets, and a large cigar in his mouth, Daisy meditated gravely enough on the untoward changes a lowered temperature might produce in his own fortunes. Hard ground would put a stop to Satanella's gallops, and the horses trained in Ireland — where it seldom freezes — would have an unspeakable advantage. Thinking of the black mare somehow reminded him of Miss Douglas, and,

pacing thoughtfully along Pall Mall, he recalled their first meeting, tracing through many an hour of sunshine and lamplight the links that had riveted their intimacy and made them fast friends.

It was almost two years ago—though it seemed like yesterday—that, driving the regimental coach to Ascot, he had stopped his team with considerable risk at an awkward turn on the Heath, to make room for her pony-carriage; a courtesy soon followed by an introduction in the enclosure, not without many thanks and acknowledgments from the fair charioteer and her companion. He could remember how she kept him talking till it was too late to back Judæus for the Cup, and recalled his own vexation when that gallant animal galloped freely in, to the delight of the chosen people.

He had not forgotten how she asked him to call on her in London, nor how he went riding with her in the morning, meeting her at balls and parties by night, inaugurating a pic-nic at Hampton Court for her especial benefit, while always esteeming her the nicest girl out, and the best horse-woman in the world. He would have liked her to be his sister, or his sister-in-law; but of marrying her himself, the idea never entered Daisy's head. Thinking of her now, with her rich beauty, and her bright black hair, he neither sighed nor smiled. He was calculating how he could "put her on" for a good stake, and send her back their mutual favourite none the worse in limbs or temper for the great race he hoped to win!

All Light Dragoons are not equally susceptible, and Mr. Walters was a difficult subject,

partly from his active habits of mind and body, partly from the energy with which he threw himself into the business of the moment whatever it might be.

Satanella's work, her shoeing, her food, her water, were such engrossing topics now, that, but for her connection with the mare, the lady from whom that animal took its name would have had no chance of occupying a place in his thoughts. He had got back to the probability of frost, and the possibility of making a tan-gallop, when he turned out of St. James's Street into one of those pleasant haunts where men congregate after nightfall to smoke and talk, accosting each other with the easy good-fellowship that springs from community of tastes, and generous dinners washed down with rosy wine.

Notwithstanding the time of year, a member

in his shirt-sleeves was sprawling over the billiard-table, a dozen more were sprinkled about the room. Acclamations, less loud than earnest, greeted Daisy's entrance, and tumblers of cunning drinks were raised to bearded lips, in mute but hearty welcome.

“You young beggar, you've made me miss my stroke!” exclaimed the billiard-player, failing egregiously to score an obvious and easy hazard. “Daisy, you're always in the way, and you're always welcome. But what are you doing out of the Shires in such weather as this?”

“Daisy never cared a hang for *hunting*,” said a tall, stout man on the sofa. “He's only one of your galloping Brummagem sportsmen, always amongst the hounds. How many couple have you scored now, this season—tell the truth, my boy—off your own bat?”

“More than *you* have of foxes, counting those that were fairly killed,” answered Daisy calmly. “And that is not saying much. Seriously, Jack, something must be done about those hounds of yours. I’m told they’ve got so slow you have to meet at half-past ten, and never get home till after dark. I suppose if once you began to draft there would be nothing left in the kennel but the terrier!”

“You be hanged!” answered the big man, laughing. “You conceited young devil, you think you’re entitled to give an opinion because you’re not afraid to ride. And, after all, you can’t half do that, unless the places are flagged out for you in the fences! If you cared two straws about the *real* sport, you wouldn’t be in London now.”

“How can I hunt without horses?” replied Daisy, burying his fair young face in an enor-

mous beaker. “*All* hounds are not like yours, you know. Thick shoes and gaiters make a capital mount in some countries; but if I *am* to put on boots and breeches I want to go faster than a Paddy driving a pig. That’s why I’ve never been to pay *you* a visit.”

“D—n your impudence!” was all the other could find breath to retort; adding, after a pause of admiration, “What a beggar it is to chaff! But I won’t let you off all the same. Come to me directly after Northampton. It’s right in your way home.”

“Nothing I should like better,” answered Daisy; “but it can’t be done. I’m due at Punchestown on the seventeenth, and I ought to be in Ireland at least a fortnight before the races.”

“At Punchestown!” exclaimed half-a-dozen voices. “There’s something up! You’ve got

a good thing, cut and dried. It's no use, Daisy! Tell us all about it!"

Walters turned from one to another with an expression of innocent surprise. He looked as if he had never heard of a steeplechase in his life.

"I don't know what you fellows call 'a good thing,'" said he. "When I drop into one I'll put you all on, you may be sure. No. I must be at Punchestown [simply because I've got to ride there."

"I'm sorry for the nag," observed the billiard-player, who had finished (and lost) his game. "What is it?"

"She's a mare none of you ever heard of," answered Daisy. "They call her Satanella. She can gallop a little, I think."

"Is she going for this new handicap?" asked a shrill voice out of a cloud of tobacco smoke in the corner.

“It’s her best chance, if she ever comes to the post,” replied Daisy. “They’re crushing weights though, and the course is over four miles.”

“Back her, me boy! And I’ll stand in with ye!” exclaimed an Irish peer, handsome in spite of years, jovial in spite of gout, good-hearted in spite of fashion, and good-humoured in spite of everything. “Is she an Irish-bred one? Roscommon did ye say? Ah, now, back for a monkey, and I’ll go ye halves! We’ll let them see how we do ’t in Kildare!”

Daisy would have liked nothing better; but people do not lay “monkeys” on steeplechases at one o’clock in the morning. Nevertheless curiosity had been excited about Satanella, and his cross-examination continued.

“Is she thoroughbred?” asked a cornet of the household cavalry, whose simple creed for man and beast, or rather horse and woman,

was summed up in these two articles—blood and good looks.

“Thoroughbred?” repeated Daisy thoughtfully. “Her sire is, I’m sure; and she’s out of a ‘Connemara mare,’ as they say in Ireland, whatever that may be.”

“*I know*,” observed the peer, with a wink. “Ah, ye divil, ye’ve got your lesson perfect annyhow!”

“Do you want to back her?” asked a tall, thin man, who had hitherto kept silence, drawing at the same time a very business-like betting-book from his breast-pocket.

“You ought to lay long odds,” answered Daisy. “The race will fill well. There are sure to be a lot of starters, and no end of falls. Hang it! I suppose I am bound to have something on. I’ll tell you what. I’ll take twelve to one in hundreds—there!”

“I’ll lay you ten,” said the other.

“Done!” replied Daisy. “A thousand to a hundred.” And he entered it methodically in his book, looking round, pencil in mouth, to know “if anybody would do it again?”

“I’ll lay you eight to one in ponies.” Daisy nodded, and put down the name of the billiard-player. “And I in tens!” exclaimed another. “And I don’t mind laying you seven!” screamed a shrill voice from the corner, “if you’ll have it in fifties.” Whereat Daisy shook his head, but accepted the offer nevertheless, ere he shut up his book, observing calmly that “he was full now, and must have something more to drink.”

“And who does this mare belong to?” asked a man who had just come in. “It’s a queer game, steeple-chasing, even with gentlemen up. I like to know something about owners before I back my little fancy, for or against.”

“Well, she’s more mine than anybody else’s,” answered Daisy, buttoning his overcoat to depart. “There’s only one thing certain about her, and that is—she’ll start if she’s alive, and she’ll win if she *can* !”

With these words he disappeared through the swing-doors into the empty street, walking leisurely homeward, with the contented step of one who has done a good day’s work, and earned his repose.

In Piccadilly he met a drunken woman; in Curzon Street, a single policeman; by Audley Square a libertine cat darted swiftly and noiselessly across his path. Working steadily northward, he perceived another passenger on the opposite side of the way. Passing under a lamp, this figure, in spite of hat pushed down and collar pulled up, proved to be none other than St. Josephs, wrapped in a brown study,

and proceeding as slowly as if it was the hottest night in June.

“Now what can *he* be up to?” thought Daisy, deeming it unnecessary to cross over at so late an hour for polite salutation. “Ought to have had his nose under the blankets long ago. It must be something *very* good to take an old duffer like that out in an east wind at two in the morning. Might have sown his wild oats by this time, one would think! Well, it’s no business of mine, only I hope he wears flannel next his skin, and won’t catch cold. It would almost serve him right, too, if he did!”

Sticking his hands in his pockets, Daisy shook his head in virtuous disapproval of his senior, never dreaming that a man of the General’s age could be fool enough to pace a wind-swept street under a lady’s window for an hour after she had retired to bed.



CHAPTER VIII.

INSATIABLE.

“MY DEAR GENERAL,
“As I know it is impossible to catch you for luncheon, come and see me at three, before I go out.

“Yours most sincerely,

“CLARA LUSHINGTON.”

No date, of course. The General, nevertheless, ordered his hack at half-past two, in confident expectation of finding his correspondent at home.

He was ushered into, perhaps, the prettiest *boudoir* in London—a nest of muslin, filigree, porcelain, and exotics, with a miniature aviary in one window, a miniature aquarium in the other, a curtain over the door, and a fountain opposite the fire-place. Here he had an opportunity of admiring her taste before the fair owner appeared, examining in turn all the ornaments on her chimney-piece and writing-table, amongst which, with pardonable ostentation, a beautifully-mounted photograph of her husband was put in the most conspicuous place.

He was considering what on earth could have induced her to marry its original when the door opened for the lady in person, who appeared, fresh, smiling, and exceedingly well-dressed. Though she had kept her visitor waiting, he could not grudge the time thus

spent, when he observed how successfully it had been turned to account.

“You got my note,” said she, pulling a low chair for him close to the sofa on which she seated herself. “I wonder, if *you* wondered why I wanted to see you!”

The experience of St. Josephs had taught him it is well to let these lively fish run out plenty of line before they are checked, so he bowed, and said, “He hoped she had found something in which he could be of use.”

“Use!” repeated the lady. “Then you want me to think you consider yourself more useful than ornamental. General, I should like to know if you are the least bit vain.”

“A little, perhaps, of your taking me up,” he replied, laughing; “of nothing else, I think, in the world.”

She stole a glance at him from under her

eyelashes, none the less effective that these had been darkened before she came down. "And yet, I am sure, you might be," she said softly, with something of a sigh.

The process, he thought, was by no means unpleasant; a man could undergo it a long time without being tired.

"Do you know I'm interested about you?" she continued, looking frankly in his face. "For your own sake—a little; for somebody else's—a great deal. Have you never heard of flowers that 'waste their sweetness on the desert air?'"

"And blush unseen?" he replied. "I'm blushing now. Don't you think it's becoming?"

"Do be serious!" she interposed, laying a slim white hand on his sleeve. "I tell you I have your welfare at heart. That's the reason you are here now. If I cannot be happy myself, at least I like to help others. Everybody ought

to marry the right person. Don't you think so? You've got a right person. Why don't you marry her?"

Watching him narrowly, she perceived, by the catch of his breath, the quiver of his eye-lid, that for all his self-command her thrust had gone straight home.

His was too manly a nature to deny its allegiance. "Do you think she would have me," said he simply and frankly, "if I was to ask her?"

Mrs. Lushington never liked him better than now. To this worldly, weary, manœuvring woman there was something inexpressibly refreshing in his unaffected self-depreciation. "What a fool the girl is!" she thought; "why, she ought to *jump* at him!" But what she said, was—" *Qui cherche trouve*. If you don't put the question, how can you expect to have

an answer? Are you so spoilt, my dear General, that you expect women to drop into your mouth like over-ripe fruit? What we enjoy is, to be worried and teased over and over again, till at last we are bored into saying 'Yes' in sheer weariness, and to get rid of the subject. How can you be *refused*, much more *accepted*, if you won't even make an offer?"

"Do you know what it is to care for somebody very much?" said he, smoothing his hat with his elbow, as a village-maiden on the stage plaits the hem of her apron. "What you suggest, seems the boldest game, no doubt; but it is like putting all one's fortune on a single throw. Suppose the dice come up against me?—can you wonder I am a little afraid to lift the box?"

"I cannot fancy *you* afraid of anything," she answered with an admiring glance; "not even

of failure, though it would probably be a new sensation. You know what Mr. Walters says—” (he winced, and she saw it)—“ ‘When you go to a fighting-house, you should take a fighting man.’ So I say, ‘When you are in a tangle about women, ask a woman to get you out of it.’ Put yourself in my hands, and when you dress for dinner, you shall be a proud and a happy General!”

His face brightened. “I *should* be very happy,” said he, “I honestly confess, if Miss Douglas would consent to be my wife. Do you advise me to ask her at once?”

“This very day, without losing a minute!” was the answer. “Let me have to congratulate her, when I call to drive her out at half-past five.”

The General looked at the clock, smoothing his hat more vigorously than ever. “It’s nearly

four now," said he, in a faltering voice. "Mrs. Lushington, I am really most grateful. It's too kind of you to take such an interest in my affairs. Would you mind telling me? Women understand these things much better than men. If you were in my place, do you think I ought?—I mean what is the best plan?—In short, would you advise me to call, and ask her point-blank, or to—to write a line, you know—very explicit and respectful, of course, and tell the servant to wait for an answer?"

She was very near laughing in his face, but mastered her gravity, after a moment's reflection, and observed sententiously—

"Perhaps in your case a few lines would be best. You can write them here if you like, or at your club. The shorter the better. And" she added, shaking hands with him very kindly, while he rose to take leave.

“whichever way it goes, you will let me know the result.”

As the street-door closed, she opened her blotting-book, and scribbled off the following dispatch—

“DEAREST BLANCHE,

“Alarms! A skirmish! I write to put you on your guard. The General, *your* General, has been here for an hour. He seems to have made up his mind, so prepare yourself for it at any moment. I think you *ought* to accept him. He would relapse into a quiet, kind, and respectable husband. Your own position, too, would be improved and what I call established. Don’t be obstinate, there’s a dear. In haste. Ever your own loving

CLARA L——

“You musn’t forget you dine here. Nobody

but ourselves, Uncle John, the two Gordon girls (Bessie has grown so pretty), and Daisy Walters, who starts for Ireland to-morrow. As soon after eight as you can."

Then she rang the bell, and sent off her note with directions for its immediate transmission. Henry must take it at once. If Miss Douglas was not at home, let him find out where she had gone, and follow her. There was no answer: only he must be quite sure she got it;—and pretty Mrs. Lushington sank back on her sofa, with the pleasing reflection that she had done what she called "a neat stroke of business, vigorous, conclusive, and compromising nobody if it was ever found out!"

She saw her way now clearly enough. On Satanella's refusal of her veteran admirer she calculated as surely as on her acceptance of an

invitation to meet Daisy at dinner, particularly with so dangerous a competitor as Bessie Gordon in the field. That last touch she considered worthy of her diplomacy. But, judging by herself, she was of opinion that Miss Douglas would so modify her negative as to retain the General in the vicinity of her charms, contemplating from day to day the fair prospect that was never to be his own. In such an ignominious state men are to be caught on the rebound, and he must ere long prove an easy victim to her kinder fascinations, take his place, submissively enough, with the other captives in the train of his conqueror. It would be very nice, she thought, to secure him, and after that she could turn her attention to Daisy; for Mrs. Lushington was never so happy as when she had succeeded in detaching a gentleman from the lady of his affections, if, in so doing, she

inflicted on the latter the sorrow of a wounded spirit and the pain of a vexed heart.

Therefore had she many enemies of her own sex, ever on the watch to catch her tripping, and once down must have expected no quarter from these gentle combatants.

A generous, masculine-minded woman, who is above all petty vanities and rivalries, enjoys considerable immunity in that society, of which the laws are made by her sisters-in-arms, but they will *not* forgive the greedy, unreasonable spoiler, who eyes, covets, and abstracts the property of others—who, to use their own expressive words, “takes their men from them, while all the time she has got enough and to spare of her own!”



CHAPTER IX.

OFF AND ON.

BUT even a woman cannot calculate with certainty on what another woman will or will not do under given circumstances. The greatest generals have been defeated by unforeseen obstacles. A night's rain or a sandy road may foil the wisest strategy, destroy the nicest combinations.

Miss Douglas never came to dinner after all, and Daisy, too, was absent. Mrs. Lushington, outwardly deploring the want of a "young man" for the "Gordon girls," inwardly puzzled

her brains to account for the joint desertion of her principal performers, a frightful suspicion crossing her mind that she might have been too vigorous in her measures, and so frightened Satanella into carrying Daisy off with her, *nolens volens*, once for all. She had short notes of excuse, indeed, from both; but with these she was by no means satisfied: the lady pleading headache, the gentleman a pre-engagement, since called to mind—this might mean anything. But if they *had* gone away together, she thought, never would she meddle in such matters again!

Not till dinner was over, and Bessie Gordon had sat down to sing plaintive ballads in the drawing-room, did she feel reassured; but the last post brought a few lines from the General, in fulfilment of his pledge to let her know how his wooing had sped.

“Congratulate me,” he wrote, “my dear Mrs. Lushington, on having taken your advice. You were right about procrastination” (the General loved a long word, and was indeed somewhat pompous when he put pen to paper). “I am convinced that but for your kind counsels I should hardly have done justice to myself or the lady for whom I entertain so deep and lasting a regard. I feel I may now venture to hope time will do much—constant devotion, more. At some future period, perhaps not far distant, it may be my pride to present to you your beautiful young charge in a new character, as the wife of your obliged and sincere friend—
V. ST. JOSEPHS.”

“V. St. Josephs!” repeated Mrs. Lushington. “I wonder what V. stands for. Valentine, if I remember right. And I wonder what on earth he means *me* to gather from his letter!

I cannot make head or tail of it. If she has accepted him, what makes him talk about time and devotion? If she has refused him, surely he never can intend to persevere! Blanche, Blanche! if you're playing a double game, it will be the worse for you, and I'll never trust a woman with dark eyes again!"

The Gordon girls, going home in their hired brougham, voted that "dear Mrs. Lushington had one of her headaches; that Mr. L. was delightful; that, after all, it seemed very selfish of Clara not to have secured them a couple of men; finally, that they had spent a stupid evening, and would be too glad to go to bed!"

All details of love-making are probably much alike, nor is there great room for variety in the putting of that direct question, to which the path of courtship necessarily conducts its pupé. General St. Josephs kept no copy of

the letter in which he solicited Miss Douglas to become his wife. That lady tore it immediately into shreds, that went fluttering up the chimney. Doubtless it was sincere and dignified, even if diffuse; worthy, too, of a more elaborate answer than the single line she scribbled in reply:—

“Come and talk it over. I am at home till seven.”

His courage rose, however, now he had got fairly into action, and never had he felt less nervous, while dismounting at the well-known door, than on this supreme occasion, when he was to learn his fate, as he believed, once for all, from the lips of the woman he loved.

Like most men trained in the school of danger, strong excitement strung his nerves and cleared his vision; he no longer averted his eyes from the face that heretofore so dazzled

them; on the contrary, entering the presence of Miss Douglas, he took in her form and features at a glance, as a man scans the figure of an adversary, while he prepares for attack.

It did not escape him that she looked flurried and depressed, that her hand trembled, and her colour went and came. Arguing favourably from these symptoms, he was somewhat disappointed with the first sentence she addressed to him.

“You wrote me a letter, General,” said she, forcing a nervous little laugh. “Such a funny letter! I didn’t quite know what to make of it!”

A funny letter! And his heart had beat, his eyes had filled, his highest, noblest feelings had been stirred with every line!

He was conscious that his bow seemed stern, even pompous, while he answered with exceeding gravity—

“Surely I made my meaning clear enough. Surely, Miss Douglas—Blanche; may I not call you *Blanche*?”

“Yes; if you like,” said she impatiently. “It’s a hateful name, I think. That’s not my fault. Well, General, what were you going to say?”

He looked and indeed felt perplexed. “I was going to observe,” said he, “that as my question was very straightforward, and very much in earnest, so all my future happiness depends on your reply.”

“I wonder what there is you can see in me to like!” she retorted, with an impatient movement of her whole body, as if she was in fetters, and felt the restraint. “I’m not good enough for anybody to care for, that’s the truth, General. There’s hardly a girl in London who wouldn’t suit you better than me.”

He was looking in her face with sincere admiration. "That is not the question," he replied. "Surely I am old enough to know my own mind. Besides, you do not seem conscious of your power. You could make a bishop fall in love with you in ten minutes, if you chose!"

There came a depth of tenderness in her eyes, a smile, half sad, half sweet, about her lips, which he interpreted in his own way.

"Do you think so?" said she. "I wish I could believe you. I've not had a happy youth, and I've not been brought up in a very good school. I often tell myself I could, and ought to have been better, but somehow one's whole life seems to be a mistake!"

"A mistake I could rectify, if you would give me the right," answered St. Josephs, disheartened, but not despairing. "I only ask

you to judge me fairly, to trust me honestly, and to love me some day, if you *can!*”

She gave him her hand. He drew her towards him, and pressed his lips to her cold smooth brow. No more, and yet he fancied she was his own at last. Already half pledged, already half an affianced wife. She released herself quickly, and sat down on the farther side of her work-table.

“You are very generous,” she said, “and very good. I still maintain you deserve somebody far superior to me. How odd these sort of things are, and why do they never turn out as one—expects.”

She was going to say “wishes,” but stopped herself in time.

He would *not* understand.

“Life is made up of hopes and disappointments,” he observed. “You do not seem to

hope much, Blanche. I trust, therefore, you will have less cause for disappointment. I will do all in *my* power. And now, dearest, do not call me impatient, fidgety; but when do you think I may look forward to—to making arrangements in which we are to be equally interested?"

"Oh! I don't know!" she exclaimed, with considerable emphasis. "Not yet, of course: there's plenty of time. And I'm so hurried and worried, I can hardly speak! Besides, it's very late. I promised to dine with Mrs. Lushington, and it's nearly eight o'clock now."

Even from a future help-meet, so broad a hint could not be disregarded. The General was forced to put on his gloves and prepare for departure.

"But I shall see you again soon," he pleaded.

“Shall you be at the Opera—at Mrs. Cramwell’s—at Belgrave House?”

“Certainly not at Belgrave House!” she answered impatiently. “I hate a crush; and that woman asks all the casuals in London. It’s a regular refuge for the destitute. I’m not going there *yet*. I may, perhaps, when I’m destitute!”

There was a hard ring in her voice that distressed him, and she perceived it.

“Don’t look so wretched,” she added kindly. “There are places in the world besides Belgrave Square and Covent Garden. What do you say to Puchestown? It’s next week, and I’m sure to be *there*!”

He turned pale, seeming no whit re-assured. “Puchestown,” he repeated. “What on earth takes you to Puchestown?”

“Don’t you know I’ve got a horse to run?”

she said lightly. "I should like to see it win; and I do *not* believe they have anything in Ireland half as good as my beautiful Sata-nella!"

"Is that all?" he asked in a disturbed voice. "It seems such an odd reason for a lady; and it's a long journey, you know, with a horrible crossing at this time of year! Blanche—Miss Douglas, can you not stay away, as—as a favour to *me*?"

There was an angry flush on her cheek, an angry glitter in her eyes, but she kept her temper bravely, and only said in mocking accents—

"Already, General! No; if you mean to be a tyrant, you must wait till you come to the throne. I intend to show at Punchestown the first day of the races. I have made an assignation with *you*. If you like to keep it, well and

good; if you like to let it alone, do! I shall not break my heart!"

He felt at a disadvantage. She seemed so cool, so unimpressionable, so devoid of the sentiment and sensibility he longed to kindle in her nature. For a moment, he could almost have wished to draw back, to resume his freedom, while there was yet time; but no, she looked so handsome, so queenly—he had rather be wretched with *her* than happy with any other woman in the world!

"Of course, I will not fail," he answered. "I would go a deal farther than Punchestown, only to be within hearing of your voice. When do you start? If Mrs. Lushington, or anybody you knew well, would accompany you, why should we not cross over together?"

"Now, you're too exacting," she replied. "Haven't I told you we shall meet on the

course, when the saddling-bell rings for the first race. Not a moment sooner, and my wish is as the law of the Medes and Persians—as yet!”

The two last words carried a powerful charm. Had he been mature in wisdom as in years, he ought never to have thought of marrying a woman who could influence him so easily.

“I shall count the days till then,” he replied gallantly. “They will pass very slowly, but, as the turnspit says in the Spanish proverb, ‘the largest leg of mutton must get done in time!’ Good-bye, Miss Douglas. Good luck to you; and I hope Satanella will win!”

He bowed over the hand she gave him, but did not attempt to kiss it, taking his leave with a mingled deference and interest she could not but appreciate and admire. “*Why* can’t I care for him?” she murmured passionately, as the street-door closed with a bang. “He’s good

he's generous, he's a *gentleman* ! Poor fellow, he loves me devotedly ; he's by no means ugly, and he's not so *very* old ! Yet I can't, I can't ! And I've promised him, *almost* promised him ! Well, come what may, I've got a clear week of freedom still. But what a fool I've been, and oh ! what a fool I *am* !”

Then she sent her excuse to Mrs. Lushington, declined dinner at home, ordered tea, didn't drink any, and so crept sorrowful and supperless to bed.





CHAPTER X.

AT SEA.

IN the British army, notwithstanding the phases and vicissitudes to which it is subjected, discipline still remains a paramount consideration—the key-stone of its whole fabric. Come what may, the duty must be done. This is the great principle of action; and, in obedience to its law, young officers, who combine pleasure with military avocations, are continually on the move to and from head-quarters, by road, railway, or steam-boat—here to-day, gone to-morrow; proposing for themselves, indeed, many

schemes of sport and pastime, but disposed of, morally and physically, by the regimental orders and the colonel's will.

Daisy, buried in Kildare, rising at day-break, going to bed at nine, looking sharply after the preparation of Satanella, could not avoid crossing the Channel for "muster," to re-cross it within twenty-four hours, that he might take part in the great race on which his fortunes now depended—to use his own expression, which was to "make him a man or a mouse."

Thus it fell out that he found himself embarking at Holyhead amongst a stream of passengers in the mid-day boat for Dublin, having caught the mail-train at Chester by a series of intricate combinations, and an implicit reliance on the veracity of Bradshaw. It rained a little, of course—it always does rain at Holyhead—and was blowing fresh from the south-west. The

sea “danced,” as the French say; ladies expressed a fear “it would be very rough;” their maids prepared for the worst; and a nautical-looking personage in a pea-coat with anchor buttons, who disappeared at once, to be seen no more till he landed, pale and dishevelled, in Kingstown harbour, opined first that “there was a capful of wind,” secondly, that “it was a ten-knot breeze, and would hold till they made the land.”

With loud throbs and pantings of her mighty heart, with a plunge, a hiss, a shower of heavy spray-drops, the magnificent steamer got under way, lurching and rolling but little, considering the weather, yet enough to render landsmen somewhat unsteady on their legs, and to exhibit the skill with which a curly-haired steward balanced himself, basin in hand, on his errands of benevolence and consolation.

Two ladies, who had travelled together in a through carriage from Euston Square, might have been seen to part company the moment they set foot on board. One of these established herself on deck, with a multiplicity of cushions, cloaks, and wrappings, to the manifest admiration of a raw youth in drab trousers and high-lows, smoking a damp cigar against the wind; while the other vanished into the ladies'-cabin, there to lay her head on a horse-hair pillow, to sigh, and moan, and shut her eyes, and long for land, perhaps to gulp, with watering mouth, short sips of brandy and water, perhaps to find the hateful mixture only made her worse.

What a situation for Blanche Douglas! How she loathed and despised the lassitude she could not fight against, the sufferings she could not keep down! How she envied Mrs. Lushington the open air, the sea-breeze, the leaping, follow-

ing waves, her brightened eyes, her freshened cheeks, her keen enjoyment of a trip that, according to different organisations, seems either a purgatory or a paradise! Could she have known how her livelier friend was engaged, she would have envied her even more.

That lady, like many other delicate, fragile women of fair complexion, was unassailable by sea-sickness, and never looked nor felt so well as when on board ship in a stiff breeze.

Thoroughly mistress of the position, she yet thought it worth while, as she was the only other passenger on deck, to favour the raw youth before-mentioned with an occasional beam from her charms, and accorded him a very gracious bow in acknowledgment of the awkwardness with which he re-arranged a cushion that slid to leeward from under her feet. She was even disappointed when the

roll of a cross-sea, combined with the effects of bad tobacco, necessitated his withdrawal from her presence, to return no more; and was beginning to wonder if the captain would never descend from his bridge between the paddle-boxes, when a fresh, smiling face peeped up from the cabin-door, and Daisy, as little affected by sea-sickness as herself, looking the picture of health and spirits, staggered across the deck to take his place by her side.

“*You* here, Mr. Walters!” said she. “Well, this is a surprise! Where have you been? where are you going? and how did you get on board without our seeing you?”

“I’ve been back for ‘muster,’” answered Daisy; “I’m going to Punchestown; and I didn’t know you were here, because I stayed below to have some luncheon in the cabin. How’s Lushington? Have you brought him

with you, or are you quite alone, on your own hook?"

"What a question!" she laughed. "I suppose you think I'm old enough and ugly enough to take care of myself! No, I'm *not* absolutely 'on my own hook,' as you call it. I've given Frank a holiday—goodness knows what mischief he won't get into!—but I've got a companion, and a very nice one, though perhaps not quite so nice as usual just at this moment."

"Then it's a lady," said Daisy, apparently but little interested in the intelligence.

"A lady," she repeated, with a searching look in his face; "and a very charming lady, too, though a bad sailor. Do you mean to say you can't guess who it is?"

"Miss Douglas, for a pony!" was his answer; and the loud, frank tones, the joyous smile,

the utter absence of self-consciousness or after-thought, seemed to afford Mrs. Lushington no slight gratification.

“You would win your pony,” she replied gently. “Yes. Blanche and I are going over to Ireland, partly to stay with some very pleasant people near Dublin, partly—now, I don’t want to make you conceited—partly because she has set her heart on seeing you ride; and so have I.”

Practice, no doubt, makes perfect. With this flattering acknowledgment, she put just the right amount of interest into her glance, let it dwell on him the right time, and averted it at the right moment.

“She’s a deuced pretty woman!” thought Daisy. “How well she looks with her hair blown all about her face, and her cloak gathered up under her dear little chin!” He felt quite

sorry that the Wicklow range was already looming through its rain-charged atmosphere, as they neared the Irish coast.

“I should like to win,” said he, after a pause, “particularly if *you’re* looking on !”

“Don’t say *me*,” she murmured, adding in a louder and merrier voice, “You cannot deny you’re devoted to Blanche ; and I dare say, if the truth were known, she has made you a jacket and cap of her own colours, worked with her own hands.”

“I like her very much,” he answered frankly. “It’s partly on her account I want to land this race. She’s so fond of the mare, you know. Not but what I’ve gone a cracker on it myself ; and if it don’t come off, there’ll be a general break-up ! But I beg your pardon, I don’t see why that should interest *you*.”

“*Don’t* you ?” said she earnestly. “Then

you're as blind as a bat. Everything interests me that concerns people I like."

"Does that mean you like *me*?" asked Daisy with a saucy smile, enhanced by a prolonged lurch of the steamer, and the blow of a wave on her quarter, that drenched them both in a shower of spray.

She was silent while he wrung the wet from her cloak and hood, but when he had wrapped her up once more, and re-adjusted her cushions, she looked gravely in his face.

"It's an odd question, Mr. Walters," said she, "but I'm not afraid to answer it, and I always speak the truth. Yes, I *do* like you—on Blanche's account. I think you've a pretty good head, and a very good heart, with many other qualities I admire, all of which seem rather thrown away."

Daisy was the least conceited of men, but

who could resist such subtle flattery as this? For a moment he wished the Emerald Isle sunk in the sea, and no nearer termination to their voyage than the coast of Anticosti, or Newfoundland. Alas! the Hill of Howth stood high on the starboard quarter, the Wicklow mountains had risen in all their beauty of colour and majesty of outline, grand, soft, seductive, robed in russet and purple, here veiled in mist, there golden in sunshine, and streaked at intervals with faint white lines of smoke.

“I’m glad you like me,” said he simply. “But how do you mean you think I’m thrown away?”

“By your leave!” growled a hoarse voice at his elbow, for at this interesting juncture the conversation was interrupted by three or four able seamen coiling a gigantic cable about the

lady's feet. She was forced to abandon her position, and leave to her companion's fancy the nature of her reply. No doubt it would have been guarded, appropriate, and to the point. Daisy had nothing for it, however, but to collect her different effects, and strap them together in proper order for landing, before he ran down to fetch certain articles of his own personal property out of the cabin.

They were in smooth water now. Pale faces appeared from the different recesses opening on the saloon. People who had been sick tried to look as if they had been sleeping, and the sleepers as if they had been wide-awake all the way from Holyhead. A child who cried incessantly during the passage, now ran laughing in and out of the steward's pantry; and two sporting gentlemen from the West—one with a bright blue coat, the other with a bright red

face—finished their punch at a gulp, without concluding a deal that had lasted through six tumbler, for a certain “brown harse by Elvas—an illigant-lepped wan,” to use the red-faced gentleman’s own words, “an’ the bouldest ever ye see. Wait till I tell ye now. He’s fit to carry the Lord-Liftinint himself. Show him his fence, and howld him if ye can!” As the possible purchaser for whom blue-coat acted, was a timid rider hunting in a blind country, it seemed doubtful whether so resolute an animal was likely to convey him as temperately as he might wish.

“Ah! it’s the Captain,” exclaimed both these sitters in a breath, as Daisy slid behind them in search of his dressing-case and his tall hat. “See now, Captain, will the mare win? Faith, she’s clean-bred, I know well, for I trained her dam meself, whan she cleaned out the whole

south of Ireland at Limerick for the Ladies' Plate!" exclaimed one.

"*You* ride her, Captain," added the other. "It's yerself that can do 't! They've a taste of temper, have all that breed; but you sit still, an' ride aisy, Captain. Keep her back till they come to race, and loose her off then like shot from a gun. Whew! She'll come out in wan blaze, and lave thim all behind, as I'd lave that tumbler there, more by token it's been empty this ten minutes. Ye'll take a taste of punch now, Captain, for good luck, and to drink to the black mare's chance?"

But Daisy excused himself, shaking hands repeatedly with his cordial well-wishers ere he hurried on deck to disembark.

Moving listlessly and languidly into upper air, the figure of a lady preceded him by a few steps. All he saw was the corner of a

shawl, the skirt of a dress, and a foot and ankle; but that foot and ankle could only belong to Blanche Douglas, and in three bounds he was at her side. A moment before, she had been pale, languid, dejected. Now, she brightened up into all the flush and brilliancy of her usual beauty, like a fair landscape when the sun shines out from behind a cloud. Mrs. Lushington, standing opposite the companion-way, noted the change. Daisy, in happy ignorance, expressed the pleasure, which no doubt he felt, at a meeting with his handsome friend on the Irish shore.

No woman, probably, likes anything she *docs* like, one whit the worse because deprived of it by force of circumstances. The fox in the fable that protested the grapes were sour, depend upon it was not a vixen. Satanella thoroughly appreciated her friend's kindness and considera-

tion, when Mrs. Lushington condoled with her on her past sufferings, and rejoiced in her recovery, informing her at the same time that Daisy was a capital travelling companion.

“He takes such care of one, my dear.” (She spoke in a very audible *aside*.) “So gentle and thoughtful; it’s like having one’s own maid. I enjoyed the crossing thoroughly. Poor dear! I wish you could have been on deck to enjoy it too!”

Done into plain English, the above really meant—“I have been having great fun flirting with your admirer. He’s very nice, and perhaps I shall take him away from you some day when I have a chance.”

By certain twinges that shot through every nerve and fibre, Blanche Douglas knew she had let her foolish heart go out of her own keeping. If she doubted previously whether or not

she had fallen in love with Daisy, she was sure of it now, while wrung by these pangs of an unreasoning jealousy, that grudged his society for an hour, even to her dearest friend.

There was but little time, however, for indulgence of the emotions. Mrs. Lushington's footman, imposing, broad-breasted, and buttoned to the chin, touched his hat as a signal that he had all *his* paraphernalia ready for departure. Two ladies'-maids, limp and draggled, trotted helplessly in his footsteps. The steward, who knew everybody, had taken a respectful farewell of his most distinguished passengers, the captain had done shouting from his perch behind the funnel, and the raw youth in high-lows, casting one despairing look at Mrs. Lushington, had disappeared in the embrace of a voluminous matron the moment

he set foot on shore. There was nothing left but to say good-bye.

Satanella's voice faltered, and her hand shook. How she had wasted the preceding three hours that she might have spent on deck with Daisy! and how *mean* of Clara to take advantage of her friend's indisposition by making up to him, as she did to every man she came near!

"I hadn't an idea you were going to cross with us," said she, in mournful accents, while he took his leave. "Why didn't you tell me? And when shall I see you again?"

"At Punchestown," replied Daisy cheerfully. "Wish me good luck!"

"Not till *then*!" said Miss Douglas. And having so said in Mrs. Lushington's hearing, wished she had held her tongue.



CHAPTER XI.

CORMAC'S-TOWN.

IF a *man* has reason to feel aggrieved with the conduct of his dearest friend, he avoids him persistently and sulks by himself. Should circumstances compel the unwilling pair to be together, they smoke and sulk in company. At all events, each lets the other see pretty plainly that he is disgusted and bored. Women are not so sincere. To use a naval metaphor, they hoist friendly colours when they run their guns out for action, and are never so dangerous or so determined as while manœuvring under a flag of truce.

Mrs. Lushington and Miss Douglas could no more part company than they could smoke. Till they should arrive at their joint destination, they must be inseparable as the Siamese twins, or the double-headed Nightingale. Therefore were they more than usually endearing and affectionate, therefore the car-man who drove them through Dublin, from station to station, approved heartily of their "nateral affection," as he called it, wishing, to use his own words, that he was "brother to either of them, or husband to both!"

If they sparred at all, it was with the gloves—light hitting, and only to measure each other's reach. Some day—the same idea occurred to them at the same moment—they meant to "have it out" in earnest, and it should be no child's play then. Meantime they proceeded to take their places in a fast train which

seemed to have no particular hour of departure, so long was it drawn up beside the platform after the passengers had seated themselves and the doors were locked. Miss Douglas possessed good nerves, no doubt, yet were they somewhat shaken by a dialogue she overheard between guard and station-master, carried on through many shrieks and puffings of the engine at the first halt they made, a few miles down the line.

“Is the express due, Denis?”

“She is.”

“Is the mail gone by?”

“She would be, but she’s broke intirely.”

“Is the line clear?”

“It is *not*.”

“Go on, boys, an’ trust in God!”

Nevertheless, in accordance with an adage which must be of Irish extraction, “Where

there is no fear there is no danger," our two ladies, their two maids, and Mrs. Lushington's footman, were all deposited safely at a wayside station in the dark; the last-named functionary, a regular London servant, who had never before been ten miles from the Standard, Cornhill, arriving in the last stage of astonishment and disgust. He cheered up, however, to find a man, in a livery something like his own, waiting on the platform, with welcome news of a carriage for the ladies, a car for the luggage, and a castle not more than three miles off!

"You *must* be tired, dear," said Mrs. Lushington, sinking back among the cushions of an easy London-built brougham. "But, thank goodness, here we are at last. Three miles will soon be over on so good a road as this."

But three Irish miles, after a long journey, are not so quickly accomplished on a dark

night in a carriage with one of its lamps gone out. It seemed to the ladies they had been driven at least six, when they arrived at a park wall, some ten feet high, which they skirted for a considerable distance ere they entered the demesne through a stately gateway, flanked by imposing castellated lodges on either side.

Here a pair of white breeches, and the indistinct figure of a horseman, passed the carriage-window, flitting noiselessly over the mossy sward.

“Did you see it, Blanche?” asked Mrs. Lushington, who had been in Ireland before. “It’s a banshee!”

“Or a Whiteboy!” said Miss Douglas, laughing. “Only I didn’t know they wore even *boots*, to say nothing of the other things!”

But the London footman, balancing himself

with difficulty amongst his luggage on the outside car, was more curious, or less courageous.

“What’s *that?*” he exclaimed, in the disturbed accents of one who fears a ghost only less than a highwayman.

“Which?” said the driver, tugging and flogging with all his might to raise a gallop for the avenue.

“That—that object!” answered the other.

“Ah! that’s the masther. More power to him!” replied the car-man. “It’s foxin’ he’ll have been likely, on the mountain, an’ him nivir off the point o’ the hunt. Divil thank him with the cattle he rides! Begorra! ye nivir see the masther, but ye see a great baste!”

All this was Greek to his listener, whose mind, however, became easier, with the crunching of gravel under their wheels, and the looming of a large, irregular mass of building, about

which lights were flashing in all directions, showing not only that they had arrived, but that they were expected and welcome.

As Blanche Douglas stepped out of the brougham, she found her hand resting in that of the supposed banshee, who had dismounted not a minute before to receive his guests. He was a tall, handsome old gentleman, fresh-coloured and grey-haired; with that happy mixture of cordiality and good-breeding in his manner, to be found in the Emerald Isle alone; yet was there but the slightest touch of brogue on the deep mellow accents that proffered their hospitable greeting.

“You’ve had a long journey, Miss Douglas, and a dark drive, but glad I am to see you, and welcome you are to the Castle at Cormac’s-town.”

Then he conducted the ladies across a fine

old hall, furnished with antlers, skins, ancient weapons, and strange implements of chase, through a spacious library and drawing-room, to a snug little chamber, where a wood-fire blazed, not without smoke, and a tea-table was drawn to the hearth. Here, excusing himself on the score of dirty boots and disordered apparel, he left the new arrivals to the care of his wife.

Lady Mary Macormac had once been as fresh and hearty an Irish lass as ever rode a four-foot wall, or danced her partners down in interminable jigs that lasted till daylight. An earl's daughter, she could bud roses, set fruit trees, milk a cow, or throw a salmon-fly with any peasant, man or woman, on her father's estate. She slept sound, woke early, took entire charge of the household, the children, the garden, the farm, anything but the stables,

was as healthy as a ploughman and as brisk as a milkmaid. Now, with grown-up daughters, and sons of all ages, down to a mischievous urchin home from school, her eyes were blue, her cheeks rosy as at nineteen. Only her hair had turned perfectly white, a distinction of which she seemed rather proud, curling and crimping it with some ostentation and no little skill over her calm unwrinkled brow. To Blanche Douglas this lady took a fancy, at first sight, reserving her opinion of Mrs. Lushington for future consideration, but feeling her impulsive Irish heart warm to Satanella's rich low voice, and the saddened smile that came so rarely, but possessed so strange a charm.

“Mrs. Lushington, Miss Douglas, me daughters.”

The introduction was soon over, the tea poured out, and some half-dozen ladies esta-

blished round the fire to engage in that small talk which never seems to fail them, and for which the duller sex find smoking so poor a substitute.

It appeared there was a large party staying at the Castle. Not that the house was full, nor indeed could it be, since only one-half had been furnished: but there were country neighbours, who came long distances; soldiers, both^r horse and foot; a "Jackeen"* or two, sporting friends of Mr. Macormac; a judicial dignitary, a Roman Catholic bishop, and a cluster of London dandies.

Mrs. Lushington's eyes sparkled, like those of a sportsman who proceeds to beat a turnip field into which the adjoining stubbles have been emptied of their coveys.

"How gay you are, Lady Mary," said she,

* Jackeen—a small squire of great pretensions.

“on this side of the Channel! I am sure you have much more fun in Ireland than we have in London!”

“I think we have,” answered her ladyship. “Though my experience of London was only six weeks in me father’s time. I liked Paris better, when Macormac took me there, before Louisa was born. But Punchestown week, Mrs. Lushington, ye’ll find Dublin as good as both.”

“Sure! I’d like to go to Paris next winter, mamma,” exclaimed the second girl, with a smile that lit up eyes and face into sparkling beauty. “Just you and me and papa, and let the family stay here in the Castle, to keep it warm.”

“And leave your hunting, Norah!” replied her mother. “Indeed, then, I wonder to hear you!”

“Are you fond of hunting?” asked Miss

Douglas, edging her chair nearer this kindred spirit.

“It’s the only thing worth living for,” answered Miss Norah decidedly. “Dancing’s not bad, with a real good partner, if he’ll hold you up without swinging you at the turns; but see, now, when you’re riding your own favourite horse, and him leading the hunt, that’s what I call the greatest happiness on earth!”

Mrs. Lushington stared.

“Ye’re a wild girl, Norah!” said Lady Mary, shaking her handsome head. “But, indeed, it’s mostly papa’s fault. We’ve something of the savage left in us still, Miss Douglas, and even these children of mine here can’t do without their hunt.”

“I can feel for them,” answered Satanella earnestly. “It’s the one thing I care for myself. The one thing,” she added rather bitterly, “that

doesn't disappoint you and make you hate every thing else when it's over!"

"You're too young to speak like that," replied the elder lady kindly; "Too young, and too nice-looking, if you'll excuse me for saying it"

"I don't *feel* young," replied Miss Douglas simply, "but I'm glad you think me nice."

If Lady Mary liked her guest before, she could have hugged her now.

"Ye're very pretty, my dear," she whispered, "and I make no doubt ye're as good as ye're good-looking. But that's no reason why ye would live upon air. The gentlemen are still in the dining-room. It's seldom they come out of that before eleven o'clock; but I've ordered some dinner for ye in the library, and it will be laid by the time ye get your bonnets off. Sure it's good of ye both to come so far, and I'm glad to see ye, that's the truth!"

The visitors, however, persistently declined dinner at half-past ten p.m., petitioning earnestly that they might be allowed to go to bed, a request in which they were perfectly sincere; for Blanche Douglas was really tired, while Mrs. Lushington had no idea of appearing before the claret-drinkers at a disadvantage.

To-morrow she would come down to breakfast rested, fresh, radiant, armed at all points, and confident of victory.

Lady Mary herself conducted them to their chambers, peeping into the dining-room on her way back to hear about the good run that had kept her husband out so late, and to see that he had what he liked for dinner at a side-table. Her appearance brought all the gentlemen to their feet with a shout of welcome. Her departure filled (and emptied) every glass to her health.

“Not another drop after Lady Mary,” was the universal acclamation, when Macormac proposed a fresh magnum; and although he suggested drinking the same toast again, a general move was at once made to the music-room, where most of the ladies had congregated with tact and kindness, that their presence might not add to the discomfort of the strangers, arriving late for dinner to join a large party at a country-house.

With Satanella's dreams we have nothing to do. Proserpine seldom affords us the vision we most desire during the hours of sleep. Think of your sweetheart, and as likely as not you will dream of your doctor. Miss Norah helped her new friend to undress, and kissed while she bade her good night; but with morning came her own maid, looking very cross (the servants' accommodation at Cormac's-town was hardly on a par with the magnificence of the mansion),

complaining first of tooth-ache from sleeping in a draught; and, secondly, with a certain tone of triumph, that the closet was damp where she had hung her lady's dresses in a row like Bluebeard's wives. The morning looked dull, rain beat against the windows, the clouds were spongy and charged with wet. It was not enlivening to have one's hair brushed by an attendant vexed with a swelled face, that constantly attracted her own attention in her lady's looking-glass.

Miss Douglas, I fear, had no more toleration than other mistresses for short-comings in an inferior. If she passed these over it was less from the forbearance of good-humour than contempt. The toilette progressed slowly, but was completed at last, and even the maid pronounced it very good. Masses of black hair coiled in thick, shining plaits, plain gold earrings, a broad velvet band tight round the neck,

supporting a locket like a warming-pan, a cream-coloured dress, trimmed with black braid, pulled in here, puffed out there, and looped up over a stuff petticoat of neutral tint, the whole fabric supported on such a pair of Balmoral boots as Cinderella must have worn when she went out walking, formed a sufficiently fascinating picture. Catching sight of her own handsome figure in a full-length glass, her spirits rose, and Miss Douglas began to think better of her Irish expedition, persuading herself that she had crossed the Channel only to accompany her friend, and not because Daisy was going to ride at Punchestown.

She would have liked him to see her, nevertheless, she thought, now in her best looks, before she went down to breakfast, and was actually standing, lost in thought, with her hand on the door, when it was opened from

without, and Mrs. Lushington entered, likewise in gorgeous apparel, fresh, smiling, beautiful in the gifts of nature as from the resources of art; to use the words of a "jackeen" who described her later in the day, "glittering in paint and varnish, like a new four-in-hand coach!"

"Who do you think is here, dear?" was her morning salutation; "of all people in the world, under this very roof? Now guess!"

"Prester John? The Archbishop of Canterbury? The great Panjandrum? How should *I* know?"

"I don't believe you *do* know. And I don't believe *he* knows. It will be rather good fun to see you meet."

"Who is it, dear?" (Impatiently.)

"Why, St. Josephs. He came yesterday morning."

Blanche's face fell.

“How *very* provoking!” she muttered; adding, in a louder voice, and with rather a forced laugh, “That man seems to be my fate! Let’s go down to breakfast, dear, and get it over!”





CHAPTER XII.

ONE TOO MANY.

AT breakfast, for an old soldier, the General showed considerable want of military skill. Miss Douglas, indeed, assumed an admirable position of defence, flanked by Norah Macormac on one side, and the corner of the table on the other; but her admirer, posting himself exactly opposite, never took his eyes off her face, handed her everything he could reach, and made himself foolishly conspicuous in paying her those attentions to which ladies do not object so much as they profess. Like many

other players, he lost his head when risking a large stake.

Had he cared less, he would have remembered that wisest of all maxims in dealing with others—“*Il faut se faire valoir,*” and she might have appreciated his good qualities all the more, to mark the esteem in which he was held by her own sex. The General could fix a woman’s attention, could even excite her interest, when he chose; and many of these laughing dames would have asked no better cavalier for the approaching races than this handsome, war-worn veteran, who “made such a fool of himself about that tall girl with black hair!”

Breakfast in a country-house is usually a protracted and elastic meal. The “jackeens,” whose habits were tolerably active, came down in good time, but the London young gentlemen

dropped in, one later than another, gorgeously apparelled, cool, composed, hungry, obviously proud of being up and dressed at eleven o'clock a.m.

Miss Norah whispered to Satanella that "she didn't like dandies, and dandies didn't like *her!*"

Looking in the girl's bright, handsome face, the latter proposition seemed to Miss Douglas wholly untenable.

"What sort of people *do* you like, dear?" said she, in answer to the former.

"The army," replied Miss Norah, with great animation. "And the cavalry, ye know—they're beautiful; but a man must have something besides a fine uniform to please *me*."

"What more *can* you want?" asked Blanche, with a smile.

"Well, a good seat on his horse now," laughed the other, "that's the first thing, surely,

and a good temper, and a good nerve, and a pleasant smile in his face when everything goes wrong.”

“You’re thinking of somebody in particular,” said Blanche.

“I am,” answered Miss Norah boldly, though with a rising blush. “I’m thinking of somebody I should wish my brothers to be like—that I should wish to be like myself. He’s never puzzled; he’s never put out. Let the worst happen that will he knows what to do, and how to do it—a fair face, a brave spirit, and a kind heart!”

She raised her voice, for the subject seemed to interest her deeply. Some of the guests looked up from their breakfasts, and the General listened with a smile.

“It sounds charming,” remarked Miss Douglas. “A hero—a paladin, and a very nice

person into the bargain. I should like immensely to see him."

"Would ye now?" said the Irish girl. "And so ye shall, dear. He'll be at the races tomorrow. Ye'll see him ride. I'll engage he'll come to the Ladies' Stand. Say the word, and I'll introduce him to ye myself."

"Is he an Irishman?" asked Miss Douglas, amused with her animated manner and perfect good faith.

"An Irishman!" exclaimed Norah. "Did ever ye hear of Walters for an Irishman's name? They call him Daisy that know him best, though mamma says I am never to mention him only as Captain Walters."

The shot was quite unexpected, but Blanche knew the General's eye was on her, and she neither started nor winced. Scarcely even changed countenance, except that she turned a

shade paler, and looked sternly in her admirer's face while he carried on the conversation.

“Not Captain Walters *yet*, Miss Macormac,” said the old soldier stiffly. “First for a troop though, and one going immediately. I know him very well, but never heard so flattering an account of him before. What a thing it is to have a charming young lady for a partisan! *We* think him a good-humoured rattle enough, and he can ride, to do him justice; but surely—eh?—there's not much *in* him. Miss Douglas here sees him oftener than I do, what does *she* say?”

“A pleasant companion, quite as clever as other people, and a right good fellow!” burst out Blanche, her dark eyes flashing defiance. “That's what *she* says, General! And what's more, she always stands up for her friends, and *hates* people who abuse them!”

The General, though he opened his mouth, was stricken dumb. Norah Macormac clapped her hands, and Mrs. Lushington, looking calmly down the table, afforded the discomfited soldier a sweet and reassuring smile.

Lady Mary, reviewing her guests from behind an enormous tea-urn, judged the moment had arrived for a general move, and rose accordingly. As, late in the autumn, coveys get up all over the ground when you flush a single bird, so the whole party followed her example, and made for the door, which was opened by St. Josephs, who sought in vain a responsive glance from Miss Douglas while she passed out, with her head up, and, a sure sign she was offended, more swing than usual in the skirts of her dress. He consoled himself by resolving that, if the weather cleared, he would ask her to take a walk, and so make friends before luncheon.

Gleams of sunshine sucking up a mist that hung about the hills above the park, disclosing, like islands on a lake, clumps of trees and patches of verdure in the valley below, glittering on the surface of a wide and shallow river, that circled and broke over its rocky bed in ripples of molten gold, would have seemed favourable to his project, but that the fine weather which might enable him to walk abroad with his ladye-love was welcomed by his host for the promotion of a hundred schemes of amusement, to while away a non-hunting day after the shooting season had closed.

“It’s fairing fast enough,” exclaimed the cheerful old man. “We call that a bright sky in Ireland, and why not? Annyhow it’s a great light to shoot a match at the pigeons; and if ye’d like to wet a line in the Dabble there, I’ll engage ye’ll raise a ten-pound fish before ye’d say ‘Paddy Snap.’”

“I’ll go bail ye will!” assented a Mr. Murphy, called by his familiars, “Mick,” who made a point of agreeing with his host. “I seen them rising yesterday afternoon as thick as payse, an’ me riding by without so much as a lash-whip in me hand.”

Two of the party, confirmed anglers, proposed to start forthwith.

“There’s a colt by Lord George I’d like ye to look at, General,” continued Macormac, who would have each amuse himself in his own way. “We’re training him for the hunt next season, and a finer leaper wasn’t bred in Kildare. D’ye see that sunk fence now parting the flower garden from the demesne? It’s not two years old he was when he broke loose from the paddock, and dashed out over it like a wild deer. There’s five-and-twenty feet, bank and ditch, ye can measure it for yourself.”

“Thirty, if there’s wan!” assented Mr. Murphy. “An’ him flyin’ over it in his stride, an’ niver laid an iron to the sod!”

The General, however, declined an inspection of this promising animal, on the plea that he was not much of a walker, and had letters to write.

“The post’s gone out this hour and more,” said his host. “But ye’d like to ride now;—of course ye would! See, Mick! Sullivan’s harriers will be at the kennel as usual. Wait till I tell ye. Why wouldn’t the boys get a fallow deer off the old park, and we’ll raise a hunt for ye in less than an hour?”

“I’ll engage they can be laid on in twenty minutes from this time,” declared Mick. “Say the word, an’ I’ll run round to the stable, and bid Larry saddle up every beast that can stand.”

“The General might ride Whiteboy,” said his

host, pondering, "and Norah's got her own horse, and I'll try young Orville, and ye shall take the colt yerself, Mick. We'll get a hunt, annyways!"

Mr. Murphy looked as if he would have preferred an older, or as he termed it, "a more accomplished hunter;" but he never dreamed of disputing the master's word, and was leaving the room in haste to further all necessary arrangements, when St. Josephs stopped him on the threshold.

"You'll think me very slow," said he graciously; "but the truth is, I'm getting old and rheumatic, and altogether I feel hardly fit for the saddle to-day. Don't let me interfere with anybody's arrangements. I'll write my letters in the library, and then, perhaps, take a turn in the garden with the ladies."

Mick screwed up his droll Irish mouth into a meaning but inaudible whistle. Satisfied by the

courtesy of his manner that the General was what he called "a real gentleman," it seemed impossible such a man could resist the temptations of a pigeon match, a salmon river, above all, an impromptu hunt, unless he had nobler game in view. Till the old soldier talked of "a turn in the garden with the ladies," Mr. Murphy told himself he was "bothered entirely," but now, failing any signs of disapproval on the master's face, felt he could agree, as was his custom, with the last speaker.

"Why wouldn't ye?" said he encouragingly. "An' finer pleasure-gardens ye'll not see in Ireland than Macormac's. That's for cucumbers, annyhow! An' the ladies will be proud to take a turn with ye, one and all. Divil thank them, then, when they get a convoy to their likin'!"

So the General was allowed to follow his own devices, while his host arranged diverse amuse-

ments for the other guests according to programme, with the exception of the deer hunt. By the time a fallow buck was secured the hounds had been fed, and, under any circumstances, Larry, the groom, reported so many lame horses in the stable, it would have been impossible to mount one-half of the party in a style befitting the occasion.

St. Josephs walked exultingly into the drawing-room, where he discovered Lady Mary alone, stitching a flannel petticoat for an old woman at the lodge. She thought he wanted the *Times* newspaper, and pointed to it on a writing table.

“Deserted, Lady Mary?” said this crafty hunter of dames, “even by your nearest and dearest. Left, like a good fairy, doing a work of benevolence in solitude.”

“Is it the—the skirt you mean?” replied her ladyship, holding up the garment in question

without the slightest diffidence. "Sure, then, I'll get it hemmed and done with this afternoon. I'd have asked Norah to help me,—the child was always quick at her needle,—but she's off to show Miss Douglas the waterfall: those two by themselves. It's as much as they'll do to be back by luncheon; though my girl's a jewel of a walker, and the other's as straight as an arrow, and as graceful as a deer."

The General's letters became all at once of vital importance. Excusing himself with extreme politeness to Lady Mary, who kept working on at the petticoat, he hastened to the library, where he did not stay two minutes, but, gliding by a side door into the hall, got his hat, and emerged on the park, with a vague hope of finding some one who would direct him to the waterfall.

The two young ladies, meanwhile, were a

good Irish mile from the Castle, in an opposite direction. Norah, of course, knew a short cut through the woods, that added about a third to the distance. They walked a good pace, and exhilarated by the air, the scenery, and the sound of their own fresh young voices, skipped along the path, talking, laughing, even jeering each other, as though they had been friends from childhood.

Their conversation, as was natural, turned on the approaching races. To Norah Macormac, Punchestown constituted, perhaps, the chief gala of the year. For those two days, alas! so often rainy, she reserved her freshest gloves, her newest bonnet, her brightest glances and smiles. To the pleasure everybody experiences in witnessing the performances of a good horse, she added the feminine enjoyment of showing her own pretty self in all her native attractions,

set off by dress. It was no wonder she should impart to her companion that she wouldn't give up the races even for a trip to Paris. She calculated their delights as equal to a whole month's hunting, and at least twenty balls.

Miss Douglas, too, anticipated no little excitement from the same source. Her trip across the Channel, with its concomitant discipline, a new country, wild scenery, the good humour and cordiality that surrounded her, above all, the prospect of seeing Daisy again, had raised her spirits far above their usual pitch. Her cheek glowed, her eye sparkled, her tongue ran on. She could hardly believe herself the same reserved and haughty dame who was wont to ride from Prince's Gate to Hyde Park Corner, and find nothing worthy to cost her a sigh, or win from her a smile.

“Everybody in Ireland goes there, absentees

and all," said laughing Norah. "It's such fun, you can't think, with the different turn-outs, from the Lord-Lieutenant's half-dozen carriages-and-four to Mr. Murphy's outside car, with Mrs. Murphy and nine children packed all over it. She never goes anywhere else with him; but you shall see her to-morrow in all her glory. We like to be on the course early, it's so amusing to watch the arrivals, and then we get good places on the Stand."

"Can you see well from the Ladies' Stand?" asked Blanche eagerly. "I'm rather interested in one of the races. You'll think me very sporting. I've not exactly got a horse to run, but there's a mare called Satanela going to start, and I confess I want to see her win."

Norah bounded like a young roe. "Satanela!" she repeated. "Why, that's Daisy's mount! Is it to win, dear? Oh! then, if she doesn't

win, or come very near it, I'll be fit to cry my eyes out, and never ask to go to a race again."

Her colour rose, her voice deepened, both gait and accent denoted the sincerity of her good wishes; and Miss Douglas, without quite admitting she had just cause for offence, felt as a dog feels when another dog is sniffing round his dinner.

"I've no doubt the mare will have justice done to her," she said severely. "He's a beautiful rider."

"A beautiful rider, and a beautiful mare entirely!" exclaimed her impulsive companion. "Now, to think he should be such a friend of yours, and me never to know it! I can't always make him out," added Miss Norah, pondering. "Sometimes he'll speak up, and sometimes he'll keep things back. You'll wonder to hear

me when I tell you I haven't so much as *seen* this mare they make such a talk about!"

"I have ridden her repeatedly," observed Miss Douglas, with a considerable accession of dignity. "In fact, she is more mine than his, and I had to give him leave before he ever sent her to be trained."

"Did ye, now?" replied the other, looking somewhat disconcerted. "And does he ride often with you in London—up and down the Park, as they call it? How I'd long for a gallop in a place like that, where they never go out of a walk!"

Blanche was obliged to admit that such rides, though proposed very frequently, came off but rarely, and Norah seemed in no way dissatisfied with this confession.

"When he's here, now," she said, "if there isn't a hunt to be got, we gallop all over the



"Come off the rock now, or you'll not have a dry thread on you in five minutes."

country-side, him and me, the same as if we'd a fox and a pack of hounds before us. It's him that taught me the real right way to hold the bridle, and I never could manage papa's Orville horse till he showed me how. It's not likely I'd forget anything Daisy told me! Here we are at the waterfall. Come off the rock now, or ye'll not have a dry thread on ye in five minutes!"

Miss Douglas, keeping back a good deal of vexation, had the good sense to follow her guide's advice, and leaped lightly down amongst the shingle from a broad flat rock to which she had sprung, as affording a view of the cascade.

It was a fine sight, no doubt. Swelled by the spring rains, and increased by many little tributaries from the neighbouring hills, a considerable volume of water came tumbling over a ledge of bold bare rock, to roar and brawl and circle round a basin fifty feet below,

not less than ten feet deep, from which it escaped in sheets of foam over certain shallows, till it was lost in a black narrow gorge, crowned by copses already budding and blooming with the first smiles of spring.

“We’re mighty proud of the Dabble in these parts,” observed Norah Macormac, when she had withdrawn her friend from the showers of spray that quivered in faint and changing rainbows under the sunshine. “There’s not such a river for fish anywhere this side the Shannon. And where there’s fish, there’s mostly fishers. See, now, Captain Walters killed one of nine pounds and a half in the bend by the dead stump there. He’d have lost him only for little Thady Brallaghan and me hurrying to fetch the gaff, and I held it while we landed the beast on the gravel below the rocks.”

It was getting unbearable! Blanche had

started in such good spirits, full of life and hope, enjoying the air, the scenery, the exercise ; but with every word that fell from her companion's lips the landscape faded, the skies turned grey, the very turf beneath her feet seemed to have lost its elasticity. Norah Macormac could not but perceive the change : attributing it, however, to fatigue, and blaming herself severely for thus tempting a helpless London girl into an expedition beyond her strength,—anticipating, at the same time, her mother's displeasure for that which good Lady Mary would consider a breach of the laws of hospitality,—“Sure ye're tired,” said she, offering to carry the other's parasol, which might have weighed a pound. “It's myself I blame, to have brought you such a walk as this, and you not used to it, may be, like us that live up here amongst the hills.”

But Blanche clung to her parasol, and repudiated the notion of fatigue. "She had never enjoyed a walk so much. It was lovely scenery, and a magnificent waterfall. She had no idea there was anything so fine in Ireland. She would have gone twice the distance to see it. Tired! She wasn't a bit tired, and believed she might be quite as good a walker as Miss Macormac."

There were times when Miss Douglas felt her nick-name not altogether undeserved. She became Satanella now to the core.

Luncheon was on the table when the young ladies got back to the Castle, and although several of the guests had absented themselves, the General took his place with those who remained. St. Josephs was not in the best of humours for a solitary walk in a strange district which had failed in its object. He sat,

as it would seem, purposely a long way from Miss Douglas, and the servants were already clearing away before he tried to catch her eye. What he saw, or how he gathered from an instantaneous glance that his company was more welcome now than it had been at breakfast, is one of those mysteries on which it seems useless to speculate ; but he never left her side again during the afternoon.

The General was true to his colours, and seldom ventured on the slightest act of disloyalty. When he returned, as in the present instance, to his allegiance, he always found himself more under authority than ever for his weak attempt at insubordination.





CHAPTER XIII.

PUNCHESTOWN.

“ I TELL ye, I bred her myself, and it’s every hair in her skin I know, when I kept her on the farm till she was better than three year old. Will ye not step in here, and take a dandy o’ punch, Mr. Sullivan ? ”

The invitation was promptly accepted, and its originator, none other than the breeder of Satanella, dressed in his best clothes, with an alarming waistcoat, and an exceedingly tall hat, conducted his friend into a crowded canvas booth, on the outside of which heavy rain was

beating, while its interior steamed with wet garments and hot whisky punch.

Mr. Sullivan was one of those gentlemen who are never met with but in places where there is money to be made, by the laying against, backing, buying, or selling of horses. From his exterior the uninitiated might have supposed him a land-steward, a watch-maker, or a school-master in reduced circumstances; but to those versed in such matters there was something indisputably *horsey* about the tie of his neck-cloth, the sit of his well-brushed hat, and the shape of his clean, weather-beaten hands. He looked like a man who could give you full particulars of the noble animal, tell you its price, its pedigree, its defects, its performances, and buy it for you on commission cheaper than you could yourself. While his friend drank in gulps that denoted considerable enjoyment, Mr.,

Sullivan seemed to absorb his punch insensibly and as a matter of course.

“There’s been good beasts bred in Roscommon beside your black mare, Denis,” observed this worthy; “and it’s the pick of the world for harses comes into Kildare this day. Whisper now. Old Sir Giles offered four hundred pounds ready money for Shaneen in Dublin last night. I seen him meself!”

“Is it Shaneen?” returned Denis, with another pull at the punch. “I’ll not deny he’s a nate little harse, and an illegant lepper, but he wouldn’t be *in* such a race as this. He’ll niver see it wan, Mr. Sullivan, no more nor a Quaker’ll niver see heaven! Mat should have taken the four hundred!”

“Mat knows what he’s doing,” said Mr. Sullivan; “the boy’s been forty years and more running harses at the Currah. May be they’re

keeping Shaneen to lead the Englishman over his leps; and why wouldn't he take the second money or run for a place, annyways?"

"An' where would the black mare be?" demanded her former owner. "Is it the likes of her ye'd see coming in at the tail of the hunt, and the Captain ridin' and all! I wonder to hear you then, Mr. Sullivan."

"In my opinion the race lies betwixt three," replied the great authority, looking wise and dropping his voice. "There's your own mare, Denis, that you sold the Captain; there's Leprauchan, the big chestnut they brought up here from Limerick; there's the English horse—St. George they call him—that's been trainin' all the time in Kilkenny. Wait till I tell ye. If he gets first over the big double, he'll take as much catching as a flea in an ould blanket; and when thim's all racing home together, why

wouldn't little Shaneen come in and win on the post?"

Denis looked disconcerted, and finished his punch at a gulp. He had not before taken so comprehensive a view of the general contest as affecting the chance of his favourite. Pushing back the tall hat he scratched his head and pondered. "I'd be thinkin' better of it, av' the Captain wouldn't have changed the mare's name," said he. "What ailed him at 'Molly Bawn' that he'd go an' call the likes of such a baste as that Satanella? Hurry now, Mr. Sullivan, take another taste of punch, and come out of this. You and me'll go and see them saddle, annyways!"

Leaving the booth, therefore, with many "God save ye's" and greetings from acquaintances crowding in, they emerged on the course close to the Grand Stand, at a spot that com-

manded an excellent view of the finish, and afforded a panorama of such scenery as, in the sportsman's eye, is unequalled by any part of the world.

The rain had cleared off. White fleecy clouds, drifting across the sky before a soft west wind, threw alternate lights and shadows over a wild expanse of country that stretched to the horizon, in range on range of undulating pastures, broken only by scattered copses, square patches of gorse, and an occasional gully, marking the course of some shallow stream from the distant uplands, coyly unveiling, as the mist that rested on their brows rolled heavily away. Far as sight could reach, the landscape was intersected by thick irregular lines, denoting those formidable fences, of which the nature was to be ascertained by inspecting the leaps that crossed the steeple-chase course. These were of a size

to require great power and courage in the competing animals, while the width of the ditches from which the banks were thrown up necessitated that repetition of his effort, by which the Irish hunter gets safely over these difficulties much as a retriever jumps a gate. A very gallant horse might indeed fly the first two or three such obstacles in his stride, but the tax on his muscles would be too exhaustive for continuance, and not to "change," as it is called, on the top of the bank, when there is a ditch on each side, would be a certain downfall. With thirty such leaps and more, with a sufficient brook and a high stone wall, with four Irish miles of galloping before the Judge's Stand can be passed, with the running forced from end to end by some thorough-bred flyer not intended to *win*, and with the best steeple-chase horses in Great Britain to encounter, a conqueror at

Punchestown may be said to win her laurels nobly—laurels in which, as in the wreath of many a two-legged hero, the shamrock is profusely intertwined.

“The boys has got about the Big Double as thick as payse,” observed Mr. Sullivan, shading his eyes under his hat-brim while he scanned the course. “It’s there the Englishman will *renage*, likely, an’ if there’s wan drops in there’ll be forty of them tumblin’ one above the other, like Brian O’Rafferty’s pigs. Will the Captain keep steady now, and niver loose her off till she marks with her eye the very sod she’s after kickin’ with her foot?”

“I’ll go bail he will!” answered Denis. “The Captain he’ll draw her back smooth an’ aisy on the snaffle, and when onest he lets her drive—whooroo! begorra! it’s not the police barracks nor yet the county gaol would hould

her, av' she gets a fair offer! I tell ye that black mare——Whisht——will ye now? Here's the quality comin' into the Stand. There's clane-bred ones, Mr. Sullivan,—shape an' action, an' the ould blood at the back of it all."

An Irishman is no bad judge of good looks in man or beast. While the Roscommon farmer made this observation, Miss Douglas was leaving Lady Mary Macormac's carriage for the Stand. Her peculiar style of beauty, her perfect self-possession, the mingled grace and pride of her bearing, were appreciated and admired by the bystanders, as with all her triumphs they had never been on her own side of the Channel.

The crowd seemed already somewhat hoarse with shouting. Their Lord-Lieutenant, with the princely politeness of punctuality, had arrived half an hour ago. Being a hard-working Viceroy, whose relaxation chiefly consisted in riding

perfectly straight over his adopted country, he was already at the back of the course, disporting himself amongst the fences to his own great content and the unbounded gratification of "the Boys." Leaping a five-foot wall, over which his aide-de-camp fell neck and crop, they set up a shout that could be heard at Naas. The Irish jump to conclusions, like women, and are as often right. That a statesman should be wise and good because he is a bold rider, seems a position hardly to be reasoned out; yet these wild untutored spirits acknowledged instinctively, that qualities by which men govern well are kept the fresher and stronger for a kindly heart to sympathise with sport as with sorrow, for a manly courage that, in work or play, trouble or danger, loves always to be in front.

So the "more powers" to his Excellency were not only loud but hearty, while for *her*

Excellency, it need hardly be said of these impulsive, chivalrous, and susceptible natures, they simply went out of their senses, and yelled in a frenzy of admiration and delight.

Nevertheless, the applause was by no means exhausted, and Miss Douglas, taking her place in the Ladies' Stand, could not repress a thrill of triumph at the remark of a strapping Tipperary boy in the crowd, made quite loud enough to be overheard.

“See, now, Larry, av’ ye was goin’ coortin’, wouldn’t ye fling down your caubeen, and bid her step on to’t? I’ll engage there’s flowers growin’ wherever she lays her foot.”

To which Larry replied, with a wink, “Divil a ha’porth I’d go on for the coortin’—but just stay where I am!”

Our party from Cormac’s-town formed no unimportant addition to the company that thronged

the Stand. Amongst these, neither Norah Macormac nor Mrs. Lushington could complain they had less than their share of admiration, while St. Josephs observed, with mingled sentiments of triumph and apprehension, that a hundred male eyes were bent on Satanella, and as many female voices whispered, "But who is the tall girl with black hair?—so handsome, and in such a peculiar style!"

A proud man, though, doubtless, was the General, walking after his young lady with her shawls, her glasses, her parasol. Choosing for her an advantageous position to view the races, obtaining for her a card of the running horses, and trying to look as if he studied it with the vaguest notion of what was likely to win.

A match had just come off between Mr. McDermott's "Comether" and Captain Conolly's "Molly Maguire," of little interest to the gene-

ral public, but creating no small excitement amongst friends and partisans of the respective owners. "Molly Maguire" had been bred at Naas—within a stone's-throw, as it were. "Comether" was the pride of that well-known western hunt, once so celebrated as "The Blazers." Each animal was ridden by a good sportsman and popular representative of its particular district. The little Galway horse made all the running, took his leaps like a deer, finished like a game-cock, but was beaten by the mare's superior stride in the last struggle home, through a storm of voices, by a length.

The crowd went into ecstasies. The gentlefolks applauded with far more enthusiasm than is customary at Bedford or Lincoln. A lovely Galway girl, with eyes of that wondrous blue only to be caught from the reflection of the Atlantic, expressed an inclination to kiss the

plucky little animal that had lost, and blushed like a rose when a gallant cornet entreated he might be the bearer of that reward to the horse in its stable. The clouds had cleared off, the sun shone out. The booths emptied themselves into the course. A hungry roar went up from the betting-ring, and everybody prepared for the great race of the day—"The United Service Handicap, for horses of all ages bonâ-fide the property of officers who have held Her Majesty's commission within the last ten years. Gentlemen riders. Kildare Hunt Course and rules."

Betting, alas! flourishes at every meeting, and even Punchestown is not exempt from the visits of a fraternity who, support racing, it may be, after a fashion, but whose room many an Irish gentleman, no doubt, considers preferable to their company. On the present occasion they made perhaps more noise than they did

business; but amongst real lovers of the sport, from the high-bred, beautifully-dressed ladies in the Stand, down to lads taking charge of farmers' horses, and "raising a lep off them" behind the booths, speculation was rife, in French gloves and Irish poplins, as in sixpenny pieces and "dandies" of punch. Man and woman each had a special fancy, shouted for it, believed in it, backed it through thick and thin.

The race had created a good deal of attention from the time it was first organised. It showed a heavy entry, the terms were fair, a large sum of money was added, public runners were heavily weighted, the nominations included many horses that had never been out before. In one way and another the United Service Handicap had grown into the great event of the meeting.

The best of friends must part. Denis could

not resist the Big Double, taking up a position whence he might hurl himself at it, in imagination, with every horse that rose. Mr. Sullivan, more practical, occupied a familiar spot that commanded a view of the finish, and enabled him to test the merits of winner or loser by the stoutness with which each struggled home.

Neither had such good places as Miss Douglas and Miss Macormac. Norah knew the exact angle from which everything could best be seen. There, like an open-hearted girl, she insisted on Blanche taking her seat, and planted herself close by. The General leaned over them, and Mrs. Lushington stood on a pile of cushions behind. She had very pretty feet, and it was a pity they should be hid beneath her petticoats.

A bell rang, the course was cleared (in a very modified sense of the term), a stable-boy on

an animal sheeted to its hocks and hooded to its muzzle (erroneously supposed to be the favourite) kicked his way along with considerable assurance, a friendless dog was hooted, a fat old woman jeered, and the numbers went up.

“One, two, five, seven, eight, nine, eleven, fifteen, and not another blank till you come to twenty-two. Bless me, what a field of horses!” exclaimed the General, adding, with a gallant smile, “The odd or the even numbers, ladies? Which will you have? In gloves, bonnets, or anything you please.”

The girls looked at each other. “I want to back Satanella,” was on the lips of both, but something checked them, and neither spoke.

Macormac, full of smiles and good-humour, in boots and breeches, out of breath, and splashed to his waist, hurried up the steps.

“See now, Norah,” said he. “I’ve just left Sir Giles. He’s fitting the snaffle himself in Leprauchan’s mouth this minute, and an awkward job he makes of it, by rason of gout in the fingers. Put your money on the chesnut, Miss Douglas,” he continued. “Here he comes. Look at the stride of him. He’s the boy that can do’t!”

While he spoke, Leprauchan, a great raking chesnut, with three white legs, came down the course like a steam-engine. No martingale that ever was buckled, even in the practised hands now steering him, could bring his head to a proper angle, but though he went stargazing along, he never made a mistake, possessed a marvellous stride, especially in deep ground, and, to use a familiar phrase, could “stay for a week.” “Hie! hie!” shouted his jockey, standing well up in his stirrups to

steer him for a preliminary canter through the crowd. "Hie! hie!" repeated a dozen varying tones behind him, as flyer after flyer went shooting by—now this way, now that—carrying all the colours of the rainbow, and each looking like a winner, till succeeded by the next.

For a few minutes St. Josephs had been in earnest conversation with one of the "jackeens," who, earlier in the day, might have been seen taking counsel of Mr. Sullivan.

"I've marked your card for you, Miss Douglas," said the General. "I've the best information from my friend here, and the winner ought to be one of these four—Leprauchan, Shaneen, St. George, or Satanella. The English horse for choice, if he can keep on his legs."

"I *must* have a bet on Satanella," ex-

claimed Miss Douglas irrepressibly, whereat the General looked grave, and Norah gave her an approving pat on the hand. "Send somebody into the Ring, General, to find out her price, and back her for ten pounds at evens, if they can't do better, on my behalf."

"I'd like to share your wager," said Norah, kindling.

"And so you shall, dear," replied Miss Douglas. "You and I, at any rate, want him to win, poor fellow; and good wishes will do him no harm."

"Here he comes!" replied Norah; and, while she spoke, Satanella was seen trotting leisurely down the course, snorting, playing with her bit, and bending to acknowledge the caresses Daisy lavished on her beautiful neck with no sparing hand.

The mare looked as fine as a star. Trained

to perfection, her skin shining like satin, her muscles salient, her ribs just visible, her action, though she trotted with rather a straight knee, stealthy, cat-like, and as if she went upon wires.

It is the first quality of a rider to adapt himself easily to every movement of the animal he bestrides, but this excellence of horsemanship is much enhanced when the pair have completed their preparation together, and the man has acquired his condition, morning after morning, in training walks and gallops on the beast. This was Daisy's case. Satanella, to a sensitive mouth, added a peculiar and irritable temper. Another hand on her rein for an hour would undo the work of days. Nobody had therefore ridden her for weeks but himself, and when the two went down the course at Punchestown together, they seemed like some

skilful piece of mechanism, through which one master-spring set all parts in motion at once.

“He’s an illigant rider,” groaned Mr. Sullivan, who stood to win on Leprauchan. “An’ ‘a give-and-take’ horseman’s the pick of the world when there’s leps. But it’s not likely now they’d all stand up in such a ‘rookawn,’”* he added, “an’ why wouldn’t the Captain get throw’d down with the rest?”

Such admiration was excited by the black mare’s appearance, particularly when she broke into a gallop, and Daisy, with pardonable coxcombry, turned in his saddle to salute the ladies smiling on him from the Stand, that few but those immediately interested noticed a little shabby, wiry-looking horse come stealing behind the crack with that smooth, easy swing

* “Rookawn,” a general scrimmage.

which racing men, though they know it so thoroughly, will sometimes neglect to their cost.

This unassuming little animal carried a plain snaffle in its mouth, without even a restraining noseband. It seemed quiet as a sheep, and docile as a dog. There was nothing remarkable about it to those who cannot take a horse in at a glance, but one of the Household left his Excellency's Stand and descended into the Ring with a smile on his handsome, quiet face. When he returned, the smile was still there, and he observed he had "backed Shaneen for a pony, and had got four to one."

Mr. Sullivan, too, as he marked the little animal increase its stride, while its quick, vibrating ears caught the footfall of a horse galloping behind it, drew his mouth into many queer shapes suggestive of discomfiture, im-

parting to himself in a whisper, that "if he rightly knawed it, maybe Sir Giles wasn't too free with his offer at all, for such a shabby little garron as that!"

So the cracks came sweeping by in quick succession, St. George, perhaps, attracting most attention from the Stand. A magnificent bay horse of extraordinary beauty, he possessed the rich colour and commanding size of the "King Tom" blood, set off by a star of white in his forehead, and a white fore-foot. No sooner did he appear with his scarlet-clad jockey, than the ladies, to use Macormac's expression, were "in his favour to a man!" The property of a popular English nobleman, a pillar of support to all field-sports, ridden by a gentleman-jockey, capable, over that course, of giving weight to most professionals, in the prime of blood, power, and condition, he was

justly a favourite with the public as with the Ring. In the whole of that multitude, there were probably but two individuals who wished he might break his neck at the first fence, and these two sat in the Ladies' Stand.

“They're all weighed and mounted now but one,” observed the General, studying his card. “What is it? Fandango? Yes, Fandango; and here he comes. What a hideous drab jacket! But I say, I'll trouble you for a goer! Why this is Derby form all over!”

“He's a good mile horse anywhere,” said the quiet man, who had backed Shaneen; “but he's not meant to win here, and couldn't if he tried. They've started him to make running for St. George.”

“What a pretty sight!” exclaimed the ladies, as something like a score of horses, ridden by the finest horsemen in the world, stood marshalled

before the Stand. Though the majority were more sedate in their demeanour than might have been expected, three or four showed a good deal of temper and anxiety to get *somewhere*. Amongst these Satanella made herself extremely conspicuous for insubordination, contrasting strikingly with little Shaneen, who stood stock-still, playing with his bit, through two false starts, till the flag was fairly down, when he darted away like a rabbit, without pulling an ounce. Win or lose, his jockey was sure of a pleasant ride on Shaneen.

“They’re really off!” said the General, getting his glasses out as a young officer, extricating himself from the betting-ring, announced breathlessly—

“They have made the mare first favourite, and are laying three to two!”

“What’s that in front?” said everybody.

“Fandango! Well, they *are* going a cracker! Fancy jumping at such a pace as that!”

Yet not a mistake was made at the first fence. To lookers-on from the Stand, all the horses seemed to charge it abreast, as their tails went up simultaneously, while they kicked the bank like lightning, and darted off again faster than before, but turning a little to the right; though the ground sloped in their favour, half-a-dozen were seen lengthening out in front of the rest, and it seemed as if the pace was already beginning to tell.

“Fandango still leading,” said the General, scanning the race through his glasses, and thinking aloud, as people always do on such occasions. “St. George and Santanella close behind, and—yes—by Jove it is! the little mud-coloured horse, Shaneen, lying fourth. Over you go! Ah, one down—two—another? I fear that

poor fellow's hurt! Look at the loose horse galloping on with them! Well done! They're *all* over the brook! St. George second! What a fine goer he is! And now they're coming to the Big Double!"

But the Big Double is so far from the Stand that we will place ourselves by the Roscommon farmer on a knoll that commands it, and watch with him the gallant sight offered by such a field of horses charging a fence like the side of a house at racing pace.

"Augh, Captain! keep steady now, for the love of the Virgin!" roared Denis, as if Daisy, a quarter of a mile off, and going like the wind, could possibly hear him. "More power to the little harse! He's leadin' them yet! Nivir say it! the Englishman has the fut of him! Ah, catch houl't of his head, ye omadawn!* He'll

* "You fool."

never see to change av' you're loosin' him off that way! Now, let the mare at it, Captain! She's doin' beautiful! An' little Shaneen, on her quarters, it's keepin' time he is like a fiddler! Ah, be aisy, you in scarlet! By the mortal, there's a lep for ye! Whooroo!!! Did ever man see the like of that!"

It was, indeed, a heavy and hideous fall. St. George—whose education in the country of his adoption had been systematically carried out—could change his footing with perfect security on the narrowest bank that was ever thrown up with a spade. To the astonishment of his own and every other jockey in the race, his "on and off" at all the preceding fences had been quick and well-timed as that of Shaneen himself; but his blood got up when he had taken the brook in his stride. He could pull hard on occasion. Ten lengths from the Big

Double he was out of his rider's hand, and going as fast as he could drive. Therefore Denis desired that gentleman to "catch hault;" but with all his skill—for never was man less "an omadawn" in the saddle—his horse had broke away, and was doing with him what it liked.

Seeing the enormous size of the obstacle before him, St. George put on a yet more infuriated rush, and with a marvellous spring, that is talked of to this day, cleared the whole thing—broad-topped bank, double ditches, and all—in his stride, covering nearly eleven yards, by an effort that carried him fairly over from field to field: nothing but consummate horsemanship in his jockey—a tact that detects the exact moment when it is destruction to interfere—enabled the animal to perform so extraordinary a feat. But, alas! where he landed the surface was poached and trodden. His

next stride brought him on his head; the succeeding one rolled him over with a broken thigh, and the gallant, generous, high-couraged St. George never rose again!

The appearance of the race was now considerably altered. Fandango dropped into the rear at once—there was nothing more for him to do in the absence of his stable-companion, and indeed he had shot his bolt ere half the distance was accomplished. The pace decreased slightly after the accident to St. George, and as they bounded over the wall, nearly together, not a man on the course doubted but that the contest lay between the first three, Satanella, Leprouchan, and Shaneen. Of these, the mare, so far as could be judged by spectators in the Stand, seemed freshest and fullest of running. Already they were laying a trifle of odds on her in the Ring.

Now Daisy had planned the whole thing out in his own mind, and hitherto all had gone exactly as he wished. In Satanella's staying powers he had implicit confidence, and he intended, from the first, that if he could have the race run to suit him, he would win it about a mile from home. After crossing the wall, therefore, he came away faster than ever, the leaps were easy, the ground inclined in his favour, and he rattled along at a pace that was telling visibly on Leprauchan, who nevertheless kept abreast of him, while little Shaneen, lying four lengths behind, neither lessened nor increased his distance from the leaders, but galloped doggedly on, in exactly the same form as when he started.

"Never saw a steeple-chase run so fast!" said everybody in the Stand. "Why, the time will be as good as the Liverpool!"

“It *can't* go on!” thought Leprauchan's jockey, feeling the chesnut beginning to roll, while pulling more than ever. “If I can but keep alongside, she *must* run herself out, and there's nothing else left in the race.”

But his whip was up when they made their turn for the run-in, and he landed over his last fence with a scramble that lost him at least a length.

“Leprauchan's beat!” shouted the crowd. “Satanella wins! It's all over—it's a moral. The mare for a million! The mare! The mare!!”

Blanche Douglas turned pale as death, and Norah Macormac began to cry.

Satanella was approaching the distance with Leprauchan beat off, and Shaneen a length behind.

Here occurred one of those casualties which

no amount of care avails to prevent, nor of caution to foresee.

The crowd in their eagerness had swayed in on the course. A woman carrying a child lost her footing, and fell helpless, directly in front of the black mare.

Daisy managed to avoid them, with a wrench at the bridle that saved their lives, and lost him some twenty feet of ground. In the next three strides, Shaneen's brown muzzle was at his quarters—at his knee—at his breastplate.

Never before had Satanella felt whip or spur. These were applied to some purpose, and gamely she answered the call; nevertheless, that shabby little horse drew on her, inch by inch.

They were neck and neck now, Shaneen's jockey sitting in the middle of his saddle, perfectly still.

“It’s a race!” shouted the lookers-on. “The little ’un’s coming up! He’s gaining on her. Not a bit of it! The mare has him safe. Keep at her, Daisy! Now, Satanella! Now, Shaneen! Did ever ye see such a fight? Neck and neck—head and head. By the powers, it’s a dead heat!”

But the Judge gave it to Shaneen by a neck, and when the numbers went up, though not till then, Daisy and Daisy’s backers knew that Satanella had only taken the second place.

Leprauchan and the rest came lobbing in by two and threes. Nobody cared for them. Nobody had attention to spare for anything but the shabby little brown horse that had beaten the favourite.



CHAPTER XIV.

“A GOOD THING.”

POOR Daisy! Everybody was sorry for him; everybody, except the owner and a few friends who won largely on Shaneen, regretted his disappointment, and shrugged their shoulders at the heavy losses it was known to have entailed. His brother-officers looked grave, but bestirred themselves, nevertheless, for the next race. His trainer shook his head, glancing wistfully at the spur-marks on the mare's reeking sides. The very crowd condoled with him, for he had ridden to admiration, and

the accident that discomfited him was patent to all. Even Mr. Sullivan, whose own hopes had been blighted by the defeat of the chesnut, expressed an opinion, that "Av' it could be run again, though there wasn't a pound between them, it was his belief the mare would win!"

Mr. Walters, however, true to his nature, kept a bold face over a troubled heart, yet had a difficult task to control his feelings, when he emerged from the enclosure after weighing and found his hand seized by the Roscommon farmer in a grip that inflicted no slight physical pain.

"Ah! now, Captain," exclaimed Denis, who had flung himself on a horse, and galloped back from the Big Double, just too late to witness the finish, "sure ye rode it beautiful! An' the mare, I seen her myself, come out from them all in wan blaze, like a sky-rocket! Bate, says

they, by a neck? I'll niver believe it! Annyways, ye'll need to pay the wagers. See, now, Captain, I parted a score o' heifers, only last Friday was it, by good luck, an' I've got the money here—rale Dublin notes—inside me coat-tail pocket. Take as much as ye'd be likely to want, Captain. What's a trifle like that betwixt you an' me? Oh! the mare would have wan, safe enough, av' she had fair play. See to her now, she's got her wind back. Begorra! She's ready to go again!”

Daisy was no creature of impulse—the last man in the world to be fooled by any sentiment of the moment—yet tears filled his eyes, and he could scarce find voice to thank his humble friend, while he declined an offer that came straight from the farmer's warm and generous heart.

Denis looked disappointed, wrang “the Cap-

tain's" hand hard, and vanished in a convenient booth to console himself with another "dandy" of punch.

Patting the mare fondly, and even laying his cheek against her warm, wet neck, the losing jockey retired to change silk and doeskin for his usual dress, in which, with his usual easy manner, he swaggered up to the Stand. Here, as has been said, his defeat excited considerable sympathy, and, indeed, in one quarter, positive consternation. Two young ladies had accompanied him through the race, with their hearts, as with their eyes. When his efforts ended in defeat, both were deeply affected, though in different ways. Norah Macormac could not refrain from tears, but conscious that mamma was on the watch, hid her face in a ridiculously small pocket-handkerchief, pretending to sneeze and blow her nose, as if she had caught cold.

Blanche Douglas, on the contrary, looked round fierce, wistful, and defiant, like a wild creature at bay. Even Daisy, approaching jauntily to receive his friends' condolences, could not but observe how pale she was, yet how collected and composed.

"I've not punished her much," said he, addressing himself, in the first instance, to the real owner of the vanquished mare. "She's as good as I told you, Miss Douglas. It was no fault of hers. If I hadn't been a muff, I'd have killed the old woman, and won in a canter! Never mind; your favourite, at least, has not disgraced her name, and I'm very glad I called her Satanella."

She laid her hand softly on his arm, and looked straight into his eyes. "Did you stand it all?" said she. "Is it as bad as you said? Tell me! Quick! I cannot bear suspense."

“Never laid off a shilling,” he answered lightly. “Never even backed her for a place. I swore I’d be a man or a mouse, as you know, and it’s come up—mouse!”

“In two words, Mr. Walters, you’re ruined!” She spoke almost angrily in her effort at self-control.

“That’s the way to say it!” was his careless reply. “General break-up—horse, foot, and dragoons. No reason, though, you should call me *Mr. Walters*.”

“Well, *Daisy*, then,” she murmured, with a loving, lingering tenderness on those syllables she was resolved never to utter above her breath again. “You know how I hoped you’d win. You know how vexed I am. You know—or rather you don’t, and never *shall* know—that it’s worse for *me* than for *you*!”

The last sentence she spoke so low he did

not catch its purport, but thinking she regretted the loss of her own wagers, he began to express sorrow for having advised her so badly.

She stopped him angrily. “I would have backed her for thousands,” she exclaimed. “I would have laid my life on her. I believe I *have!*”

“Then you don’t owe the mare a grudge!” he answered cheerily. “I thought you wouldn’t. She’s not a pin the worse for training. You’ll take her back, won’t you?—and—and—you’ll be kind to her for her own sake?”

She seemed to waver a moment, as if she weighed some doubtful matter in her mind. Presently, with cleared brow, and frank, open looks, she caught his hand.

“And for *yours!*” said she. “I’ll never part with her. So long as we three are above

ground, Satanella—my name-sake—will be a—
a—remembrance between you and me!”

Then she beckoned the General, who was talking to some ladies behind her, and asked for information about the next race, with a kindness of tone and manner that elevated the old soldier to the seventh heaven.

Meanwhile, Miss Macormac had found time to recover her composure. Turning to Mr. Walters, she showed him a bright and pretty face, with just such traces of the vexation that had clouded it as are left by passing showers on an April sky. Her eyes looked deeper and darker for their late moisture, her little nose all the daintier that its transparent nostrils were tinged with pink.

She gave him her hand frankly, as though to express silent sympathy and friendship. Sinking into a seat by her side, Daisy embarked

on a long and detailed account of the race, the way he had ridden it, the performances of St. George, Leprauchan, Shaneen, and his own black mare.

Though he seldom got excited, he could not but break into a glowing description, as he warmed with his narrative. “When I came to the wall,” he declared, “I was as sure of winning as I am of sitting by you now. St. George had been disposed of, and he was the only horse in the race whose form I did not know to a pound. Leprauchan, I felt satisfied, could never live the pace, if I made it hot enough. And as for little Shaneen, the mare’s stride would be safe to defeat *him*, if we finished with a set-to, in the run-in. Everything had come off exactly to suit me, and when we rounded the last turn but one I caught hold of Satanella, and set her going down the hill like an express-train!”

“Did ye now?” she murmured, her deep grey eyes looking earnestly into his, her sweet lips parted, as though with a breathless interest that drank in every syllable he spoke.

“*Did ye now?*” Only three words, yet carrying with them a charm to convince the most practical of men that the days of spells and witchcraft are not yet gone by. An Englishwoman would have observed, “Really!” “Oh, indeed!” “You don’t say so!” or made use of some such cold conventional expression to denote languid attention, not thoroughly aroused; but the Irish girl’s “*Did ye now?*” identified her at once with her companion and his doings, started them both incontinently on that path of congenial partnership, which is so seductive to the traveller, smooth, pleasant all down-hill, and leading—who knows where?

Perhaps neither deep liquid eyes, nor dark lashes, nor arched brows, nor even smiles and blushes, and shapely graceful forms, would arm these Irish ladies with such unequalled and irresistible powers, were it not for their kindly womanly nature that adapts itself so graciously to those with whom it comes in contact—their encouraging “Did ye now?” that despises no trifle, is wearied with no details, and asks only for his confidence whom they honour with their regard. Perhaps, also, it is this faculty of sympathy and assimilation, predominant in both sexes, that makes Irish society the pleasantest in the world.

Thus encouraged, Daisy went off again at score, described each fence to his eager listener, dwelt on every stride, and explained the catastrophe of the woman and child, observing, in conclusion, with a philosophy all his own, that

it was "hard lines to be done just at the finish, and lose a hat-full of money by three-quarters of a yard!"

She looked up anxiously. "Did ye make such heavy bets now?" she said, in a tone of tender reproach. "Ah! Captain Walters, ye told me ye never meant to run these risks again!"

"It was for the last time," he answered rather mournfully. "If the old woman had been at home and in bed, I should have been my own master at this moment, and then—never mind what *then!* It's no use bothering about that now!"

She blushed to the very roots of her hair—why, she would have been at a loss to explain,—crumpled her race-card into a hundred creases, and observed innocently—

"Why should it make any difference now?"

Do ye think we'd like you better for being a hundred times a winner? I wouldn't then, for one!”

He was sitting very close, and nobody but herself heard the whisper, in which he asked—

“Then you don't despise a fellow for losing, Miss Macormac, do you?”

“Despise him?” she answered with flashing eyes. “Never say the word! If I liked him before, d'ye think I wouldn't like him ten times better after he'd been vexed by such a disappointment as that! Ye're not understanding what I mean, and maybe I'm not putting it into right words, but it seems to me—— Yes, dear mamma, I'm minding what you say! Sure enough, it is raining in here fit to drown a fish! I'm obliged to ye, Captain. Will ye kindly shift the cloak and cushions to that dry place yonder by Lady Mary. How wet the poor riders will

be in their silk jackets! I'm pleased and thankful now—indeed I am—that ye're sheltered safe and dry in the Stand."

The last remark in a whisper, because of Lady Mary's supervision, who, thinking the *tête-à-tête* between Daisy and her daughter had lasted long enough, took advantage of a driving shower and the state of the roof to call pretty Miss Norah into a part of the Stand which she considered in every respect more secure.

The sky had again darkened, the afternoon promised to be wet. Punchestown weather is not proverbial for sunshine, and Mrs. Lushington, who had done less execution than she considered rightly due to a new toilette of violet and swan's-down, voted the whole thing a failure and a bore. The last race was run off in a pelting shower, the Lord-Lieutenant's carriages and escort had departed, people gathered up

their shawls and wrappings with little interest in anything but the preservation of dry skins. Ladies yawned and began to look tired, gentlemen picked their way through the course ankle-deep in mud to order up their several vehicles, horse and foot scattered themselves over the country in every direction from a common centre, the canvas-booths flapped, the wind blew, the rain fell, the great day's racing was over, and it was time to go home.

Norah Macormac's ears were very sharp, but they listened in vain for the expected invitation from Lady Mary, asking Daisy to spend a few days with them at the Castle. Papa, whose hospitality was unbounded and uncontrollable, would have taken no denial under any circumstances; but papa was engaged with the race committee, and intended, moreover, to gallop home across country by himself. There seemed

nothing for it but to put as much cordiality into her farewell as was compatible with the presence of bystanders and the usages of society.

Miss Norah no doubt acquitted herself to Daisy's satisfaction—and her own.

Mr. Sullivan, whose experience enabled him to recover his losses on the great handicap by a judicious selection of winners in two succeeding races, did not, therefore, depart without a final glass of comfort, which he swallowed in company with the Roscommon farmer. To him he expounded his views on steeple-chasing, and horses in general, at far greater length than in the forenoon. It is matter of regret that, owing to excitement, vexation, and very strong punch, Denis should have been much too drunk to understand a word he said. The only idea this worthy seemed clearly to take in, he repeated over and over again in varying tones

of grief and astonishment, but always in the same terms:—

“The mare can do it, I tell ye! an’ the Captain rode her beau-tiful! Isn’t it strange, now, to see little Shaneen comin’ in like that at the finish, an’ givin’ her a batin’ by a neck!”





CHAPTER XV.

WINNERS AND LOSERS.

DINNER that day at the Castle seemed less lively than usual. Macormac, indeed, whose joviality was invincible, ate, drank, laughed, and talked for a dozen; but Lady Mary's spirits were obviously depressed; and the guests, perhaps not without private vexations of their own, took their cue rather from hostess than host. An unaccountable sense of gloom and disappointment pervaded the whole party. The General, having come down early, in hopes of a few minutes with Miss

Douglas in the drawing-room before the others were dressed, had been disappointed by the protracted toilet and tardy appearance of that provoking young lady, with whom he parted an hour before on terms of mutual sympathy and tenderness, but who now sat pale and silent, while the thunder-clouds he knew and dreaded gathered ominously on her brow. His preoccupation necessarily affected his neighbour—a budding beauty fresh from the school-room, full of fun and good-humour, that her sense of propriety kept down, unless judiciously encouraged and drawn out. Most of the gentlemen had been wet to the skin, many had lost money, all were tired, and Norah Macormac's eyes filled every now and then with tears. These discoveries Mrs. Lushington imparted in a whisper to Lord St. Abbs as he sat between herself and her hostess, whom he had taken in

to dinner, pausing thereafter to mark the effect of her condescension on this raw youth, lately launched into the great world. The young nobleman, however, betrayed no symptoms of emotion beyond screwing his eye-glass tighter in its place, and turning round to look straight in her face, while it dropped out with a jump. Even Mrs. Lushington felt at a disadvantage, and took counsel with her own heart whether she should accost him again.

Why Lord St. Abbs went about at all, or what pleasure he derived from the society of his fellow-creatures, was a puzzle nobody had yet been able to find out. Pale, thin, and puny in person, freckled, sandy-haired, bearing all outward characteristics of Scottish extraction, except the Caledonian's gaunt and stalwart frame, he neither rode, shot, fished, sang, made jokes, nor played whist. He drank very little,

conversed not at all, and was voted by nearly all who had the advantage of his acquaintance "the dullest young man out!"

Yet was he to be seen everywhere, from Buckingham Palace or Holland House to Hampton races and the fireworks at Cremorne; always alone, always silent, with his glass in his eye, observant, imperturbable, and thinking, no doubt, a great deal.

It was rumoured, indeed, that on one memorable occasion he got drunk at Cambridge, and kept a supper-party in roars of laughter till four a.m. If so, he must have fired all his jokes off at once, so to speak, and blown the magazine up afterwards; for he never blazed forth in such lustre again. He came out a wrangler of his year, notwithstanding, and the best modern linguist, as well as classical scholar, in the University. Though the world of ball-goers and

diners-out ignores such distinctions, a strong political party, hungering for office, had its eye on him already. As his father voted for Government in the Upper House, a provident director of the Opposition lost no time in sounding him on his views, should he become a member of the Lower. How little, to use his own words, the *whip* "took by his motion" may be gathered from the opinion he expressed in confidence to his chief, that "St. Abbs was either as close as wax or the biggest fool (and it's saying a great deal) who ever came out of Cambridge with a degree!"

Gloomy as a dinner-party may appear at first, if the champagne circulates freely people begin to talk long before the repast is half over. What must children think of their seniors when the dining-room door opens for an instant, and trailing up-stairs unwillingly to bed, they linger

to catch that discordant, unintelligible gabble going on within? During a lull Mrs. Lushington made one more effort to arouse the attention of Lord St. Abbs.

“We’re all getting better by degrees,” said she, with a comic little sigh. “But it has been a disastrous day, and I believe everybody feels just as I do myself.”

“How?” demanded his lordship, while the eye-glass bounced into his plate.

“Like the man who won a shilling and lost eighteenpence,” she answered, laughing.

“Why?” he asked, yet more austerely, screwing the instrument into position the while, with a defiant scowl.

She was out of patience—no wonder.

“Good gracious, Lord St. Abbs!” said she. “Haven’t we all been on the wrong horse? Haven’t we all been backing Daisy?”

She spoke rather loud, and was amused to observe the effect of her observation. It was like dropping a squib in a boy's school during lessons. Everybody must needs join in the excitement.

“A bad job, indeed!” said one.

“A great race entirely!” added another. “Run fairly out from end to end, and only a neck between first and second at the finish!”

“I wish I'd taken old Sullivan's advice,” moaned a third; “or backed the mare for a place, annyhow.”

“Ye might have been wrong even then, me boy,” interrupted a jolly, red-faced gentleman, “unless ye squared the ould woman! I wonder would she take three half-crowns a day to come with me twice a year to the Curragh?”

“I knew of the mare's trial,” drawled one of the London dandies, “and backed her to win

me a monkey. Daisy put me on at once, like a trump. It was a real good thing—and it has boiled over. (Champagne, please.) Such is life, Miss Douglas. We have no hope of getting home now till Epsom Spring.”

Miss Douglas, not the least to his discomfiture, stared him scornfully in the face without reply.

“I’m afraid it’s a severe blow to young Walters,” observed the General. “They tell me he has lost a good deal more than he can afford.”

“Got it, I fancy, very hot!” said the dandy. “Gad, he rode as if he’d backed his mount. I thought his finish one of the best I ever saw.”

Norah Macormac threw him the sweetest of glances, and wondered why she had considered him so very uninteresting till now.

“They say he hasn’t a shilling left,” con-

tinued the General, but stopped short when he caught the flash of Satanella's eye, under its dark, frowning brow.

"I dare say he'll pull through," said she bitterly, "and disappoint his dearest friends, after all."

"I'll engage he will, Miss Douglas!" exclaimed Macormac's hearty voice from the end of the table. "It's yourself wouldn't turn your back on a friend, lose or win. Take a glass of that claret, now. It'll not hurt ye. Here's the boy's health, and good luck to him! A pleasanter fellow, to my mind, never emptied a bottle, and a better rider never sat in a saddle than he's proved himself this day!"

Norah would have liked to jump up and hug papa's handsome white head in her embrace on the spot, but Lady Mary had been watching the girl to-night with a mother's anxiety, and

fearful lest her daughter should betray herself if subjected to further trial, gave the signal rather prematurely for the ladies to withdraw.

While they trooped gracefully out, the gentlemen were still discussing Daisy's defeat, and the catastrophe of the Great United Service Handicap.

Everybody knows what men talk about when left alone after dinner ; but none, at least of the rougher sex, can venture to guess the topics with which ladies beguile their seclusion in the drawing-room. Whatever these might be, it seems they had little interest for Mrs. Lushington, whose habit it was to retire for ten minutes or so to her own chamber, there, perhaps, to revise and refresh her charms ere she descended once more upon a world of victims.

Her bedroom was gorgeously furnished, supplied with all the luxuries to which she was

accustomed; but the windows did not shut close, and a draught beneath the door lifted the hearth-rug at her fire-place, therefore she made but a short stay in her apartment, stealing softly down-stairs again, so as to be well settled in the drawing-room before the gentlemen came in.

Traversing the library, she heard Lady Mary's voice carrying on, as it seemed, a subdued, yet sustained conversation, in a little recess adjoining, which could hardly be called a boudoir, but was so far habitable, that in it there usually stood a lamp, a chess-board, and a card-table. Mrs. Lushington would not have *listened*, be sure, to save her life, but the *Dublin Evening Mail* lay close at hand on a writing-table. She became suddenly interested in a Tipperary election, and the price of pigs at Belfast.

Lady Mary's accents were low, grave, even sorrowful. It was difficult to catch more than a sentence here and there; but, judging by the short, quick sobs that replied to these, they seemed to produce no slight effect on the other party to the conversation.

Mrs. Lushington smiled behind her paper. What she heard only confirmed what she suspected. Her eyes shone, her brow cleared. She felt like a child that has put its puzzle together at last.

Lady Mary warmed with her subject; presently she declared, distinctly enough, that something was "not like *you*, my dear. In any other girl I'd have called it bold, forward, unwomanly!"

"Oh, mamma! mamma! don't say that!" pleaded a voice that could only belong to poor Norah. "If *you* think so, what must *he* have

thought? Oh dear! oh dear! what shall I do? What shall I do?"

"It's never too late to remember your duty, my child," answered Lady Mary, "and I'm sure your father thinks as I do;" but though the words sounded brave enough, there was a tremble in the mother's voice that vibrated from the mother's heart.

"And I'll never see him again now, I *know*!" murmured Norah so piteously, that Lady Mary could hardly keep back her tears.

"Well, it's not come to that yet," said she kindly. "Annyways; it's wise to make ready for the worst. Kiss me, dear, and mind what I've been telling ye. See now, stay here a bit, till you're more composed. I'll send in little Ella to keep ye company. The child won't take notice, and ye can both come back together into the drawing-room, and no more said."

But long ere Lady Mary could finish her caresses, and get her motherly person under weigh, Mrs. Lushington had slipped into the billiard-room, where she was found by the gentlemen practising winning hazards in solitude, and where, challenging Lord St. Abbs to a game, she was left discomfited by his very uncivil rejoinder—

“I don’t play billiards,” said his lordship, and turned on his heel without further comment or excuse.

‡ It was a new sensation for Mrs. Lushington to find herself thus thrown on general society, without at least one particular admirer on whose devotion she could rely. She didn’t like it. She longed to have a finger in that mischief which is proverbially ready for “idle hands to do.” On three people she now resolved to keep close and vigilant watch.

These were Norah, St. Josephs, and Sata-nella.

The conduct of this last seemed baffling in the extreme. She had scarce vouchsafed a word to the General during dinner, had scowled at him more than once with the blackest of her black looks, and comported herself altogether like the handsome vixen she could be when she chose. Now, under pretence of setting down her coffee-cup, she had brought him to her side, and was whispering confidences in his ear, with a tenderness of tone and bearing he accepted gratefully, and repaid a hundred-fold.

“How tolerant are these *old* men!” thought Mrs. Lushington, “and how kind! What lovers they make, if only one can bring oneself not to mind wrinkles, and rheumatism, and grey hair! How gentle and how chivalrous! What patience and consideration! They don’t expect

a woman to be an angel, because they *do* know a little about us; and perhaps because it *is* only a little, they believe there is more than one degree between absolute perfection and utter depravity. If jealous, they have the grace to hide it; if snubbed, they do not sulk; if encouraged, they do not presume. They know when and where to speak, and to hold their tongues; to act, and to refrain. Besides, if one wants to make them unhappy, they are so sensitive, yet so quiet. A word or a look stings them to the quick, but they take their punishment with dignity; and though the blow be sharp and unprovoked, they never strike again. Let me see. I don't think I've had an admirer above forty—not one who owned to it, at least. It's a new experience. I declare, I'll try! This romantic old General would suit the place exactly, and I couldn't do a kinder thing for

both, than to detach him from Blanche. The man is regularly wasted and thrown away. My gracious! isn't it ridiculous? If he could see us as we really are! If he only knew how much more willing a woman is to be controlled than a violent horse; how much easier to capture than a Sepoy column, or a Russian gun. And there he sits, a man who has ridden fearlessly against both, shrinking, hesitating, before a girl who might be his daughter — afraid, absolutely afraid, the gallant, heroic coward, to look her in the face! Is she blind? Is she a fool, not knowing what she throws away? or is she *really* over head and ears in love with somebody else? She can't be breaking her heart for Daisy, surely, or why has she taken the General up again, and put herself so much *en evidence* with him to-night? I'm puzzled, I own, but I'm not going to be beat. I'll watch her narrowly.

I've nothing else to do. And it's an awful temptation, even when people are great friends. Wouldn't it be fun to cut her out with both?"

Thus reasoned Mrs. Lushington, according to her lights, scrutinising the couple she had set herself to study, while languidly listening to Lady Mary's conversation, which consisted, indeed, of speculations on the weather in the Channel, mingled with hospitable regrets for the departure of her guests, and the breaking-up of the party, which was to take place on the morrow.

"But ye'll come again next year," said this kind and courteous lady, who, anywhere but in her own house, would have disliked Mrs. Lushington from her heart. "And ye'll bring Miss Douglas with ye. If Miss Douglas she continues to be" (with a significant glance at the General, holding, clumsily enough, a skein of

much tangled silk). "But, annyhow, I'll be lookin' for ye both Punchestown week, if not before, to give us a good long visit, and we'll teach ye to like Ireland, that we will, if kind wishes and a warm welcome can do't."

But even while she spoke, Lady Mary looked anxiously towards the door. Little Ella, a flaxen-haired romp of eleven, had jumped off long ago with a message for sister Norah, but neither having yet returned, the mother's heart ached to think of her handsome darling, smarting, perhaps, even under the mild reproof she had thought it wise to administer, perhaps weeping bitterly, to her little sister's consternation, because of the pain that burns so fiercely in a young unwearied heart—the longing for a happiness that can never be.

Presently, Lady Mary's brow cleared, and she gave a little sigh of relief, for Miss Ella's voice

was heard, as usual, chattering loudly in the passage; and that young person, much elated at being still out of bed, came dancing into the room, followed by Norah, from whose countenance all traces of recent emotion had disappeared, and who looked, in her mother's eyes, only the prettier, that she was a shade paler than usual. While the younger child laughed and romped with the company, fighting shy of Lord St. Abbs, but hovering with great glee about papa, and entreating not to be sent upstairs for five more minutes, her sister stole quietly off to a lonely corner, where she subsided into an unoccupied sofa, with the air of being thoroughly fatigued.

Mrs. Lushington, covertly watching Satanella, wondered more and more.

Breaking away from her General, her silks, and her unfinished cup of tea, Miss Douglas

walked across the room like a queen, took Norah's head in both hands, kissed her exactly between her eye-brows, and sat down composedly by her side.

END OF VOL I.

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